Sandwell CHRONICLE

Thursday, December 22, 2016 | Read by more than 57,000 people | Price when sold 60p

THREE ARRESTED AS CAR BURSTS INTO FLAMES AFTER DRAMATIC CHASE

The southbound M6 was temporarily blocked due to the fire

A DRAMATIC 100mph police chase on the M6 through the Black Country and Birmingham ended with a suspected stolen car bursting into flames.

Police used a spike strip, known as a stinger, to deflate the tyres.

The Audi R8 was being driven down the motorway late on Saturday night at the time.

Officers from the Central Motorway Police Group claimed the car had hits speeds of 100mph during the pursuit.

Traffic officers had caught up with the car at junction eight at the link for the M5.

They then attempted to halt the chase using the stinger at around 10.30pm.

But the car continued for around five miles before it came to a halt near Spaghetti Junction for the A38(M) Aston Expressway.

Moments later, the car burst into flames while still on the motorway. A 24-year-old was arrested on suspicion of theft of a motor vehicle.

Theft

Two other men, aged 29 and 31, in a separate car following the vehicle, were also arrested after being stopped by officers.

They were taken into custody for questioning in relation to the theft of the Audi.

Officers working for Central Motorway Police Group tweeted: "High performance stolen vehicle safely stung junc 8 #M6 then pursued to junc 6, after driving over 100mph. Three males were arrested and are now in custody."

Highways England officials posted a warning to motorists caught up in the drama at around 11.45pm.

Long delays built up behind the closure as flames destroyed the car.

The southbound section between junction seven for Great Barr and junction six was temporarily blocked due to the fire close to the exit slip road on the carriageway.

Crews from West Midlands Fire Service were called to the scene to extinguish the flames.

The junction six southbound exit for the A38M was reopened at around 1.30am on Sunday.

TRANSFORMED

Three high rise flats look set for revamp

THREE high rise flats in Oldbury could be part of a 'major' external refurbishment.

The proposals will see the storey blocks, Hackwood, Harry Price and Wallace House, transformed under plans submitted to Sandwell Council earlier this month.

The work would include external refurbishment of elevations and balconies, pitched roofs with solar panels, entrance porch and landscaping to include extra car parking areas.

Funding would be from the council Neighbourhood Services fund. Access would remain the same but remodelled for disabled access. Metal pvc windows would be replaced with double glazed aluminium.

Shocking cases of victims conned for up to 13 years

WOMAN DUPED OUT OF £100k

A WOMAN in her 50s was swindled out of £100,000 over 10 years as she was repeatedly conned by fraudsters. Another victim – a vulnerable woman in her 80s – lost £25,000 as she was reeled in by conmen.

The shocking cases have been revealed as trading standards teams launched a bid to crack down on rogue traders and scam fraudsters in the borough. Sandwell Council bosses said the women were just two of 21 people identified as 'priority victims' of financial scams.

BY RICHARD GUTTRIDGE

The woman in her 80s was targeted again and again during a 13-year period, it was revealed.

Experts said typical tricks which residents had fallen for included crooks posing as maintenance workers, 'the water board' and the council.

They also claimed that work needed doing on roofs, drives and gardens.

Fraudsters also use a wide range of techniques in scams. They include lottery or prize draws, Nigeria letters, romance and also pension scams.

Heartbreaking

Bosses are desperate to make contact with people who think that they may have been conned, as they said that more more than 60 per cent go on to become repeat victims.

Councillor Preet Gill, in charge of public health and protection at Sandwell Council, said the cases were 'heartbreaking' and urged people not to give out money or their bank details to people they don't know.

She said: "It is a real concern that people have taken advantage of vulnerable people, so I would say to residents 'Don't disclose personal bank details to anyone over the phone or by email'.

"If people are unsure, they should go to the bank to check things out. This could be anyone's parents, neighbours or someone we know.

"People have worked hard to save money, and for someone to come along and take advantage of that is distressing. Anyone can be a victim and the council understands that," she added.

"That's why we support them and have the trading standards number people can ring for clarity and advice."

Offenders have been described as being career criminals or from 'organised crime gangs'.

The most common type of victim was said to be women in their 80s who live alone as they were likely to be trusting, making them an easier target.

Council chiefs said that victims of fraud were often left feeling ashamed and embarrassed.

The trading standards telephone number is 03454 04 05 06.

In 2011, two men and a woman were jailed for a total of 13-and-a-half years for duping an elderly man from Oldbury out of £46,000.

Child's play for festive boost

Mark Stanford from Serco, Mandeep Kaur, pupils Parminder Kaur and Rajan Mattu, and Tony Martin

UNWANTED, good quality toys that would otherwise be destined for the tip will be cheering up needy children this Christmas.

The household recycling centre in Oldbury has been collecting unwanted toys to donate to families.

The project is being run with children from Bristnall Hall Academy, former recycling centre worker Tony Martin and Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals (SWBH) NHS Health Visiting Services.

Staff have been encouraging visitors to the tip to hand over good quality toys that would otherwise go into the recycling bay. The toys are sent to pupils at Bristnall Hall Academy who are wrapping the gifts to hand over to health visitors, Brushstrokes and Black Country Women's Aid.

Tony Martin, who came up with the idea for the scheme, said: "From starting this campaign three years ago, to what it is today, is amazing."

EMERGENCIES

Road crashes keep call-out teams busy

SEVERAL crashes kept the emergency services busy at the weekend.

A car and a motorcycle were involved in a collision in Oldbury, at the junction of Newbury Lane and Wolverhampton Road, at 10.14pm on Friday. One man was taken to hospital.

On Saturday at 8am, two cars were in a head-on collision in Forge Lane, West Bromwich. A car was left badly damaged in a crash near the junction of Highfield Road and Glebefields Road in Great Bridge at 9am on Sunday.

APPEAL

Generous readers donate 8,500 items

AN INCREDIBLE 8,500 food items and toiletries have been donated to the Express & Star's Feed a Family This Christmas appeal.

The Chronicle's sister newspaper has been overwhelmed by the kindness of people across the Black Country and Staffordshire who have dug deep to help those less fortunate.

Donations of festive treats and other produce have flooded in since the appeal was launched five weeks ago.

Every item will go towards helping families to put a substantial meal on the table this Christmas.

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Post Office staff strike over issues

POST Office workers in the Black Country are taking part in five days of strike action including Christmas Eve in a dispute over jobs, pensions and branch closures.

The Communication Workers Union (CWU), behind the protest, is embroiled in a long-running dispute over job losses, the closure of a final salary pension scheme and the franchising of Crown Post Offices, the larger branches usually sited on high streets.

On December 3 staff at the branch on John Street, Willenhall and Darwall Street in Walsall were among hundreds in the country who took part in a 24-hour walkout.

The CWU has yet to state how many Black Country workers are set join the picket lines next week or which branches will be affected.

CWU assistant secretary Andy Furey said: "All of the blame for this unfortunate turn of events is 100 per cent down to the intransigence of the company.

"Our members want the Post Office management to pause its closure and privatisation programme, hold off on its planned pensions changes, and commit to sitting down with us and with the other key stakeholders of this Great British institution.

"We want to work together to build a positive future for the Post Office, its workforce and, of course, the people who we serve. The CWU can be a constructive partner to work with, but sadly, the people currently running the company have chosen the path of conflict." The Post Office moved to reassure people that the vast majority of branches would not be involved in the action. Kevin Gilliland, the Post Office's network and sales director, said: "We agreed with the CWU that we would resume talks, which have been ongoing throughout the summer.

"We are extremely disappointed that they prefer to resort to calls for strike action and we will be reviewing our position in light of this development. We want to reassure customers that if further strike action takes place next week at least 97 per cent of our 11,600 branches will not be involved. It will be business as usual in almost all of our network."

HS2 bosses accused of 'brainwashing' pupils

THE company behind high-speed rail line HS2 has been accused of 'brainwashing' pupils over the benefits of the £55.7 billion project.

The claims came after it signed a £280,000 contract to 'educate' children in primary schools about the scheme.

The deal has been criticised by campaigners who have dubbed it as state-sponsored 'propaganda' promoting the HS2 line.

Key Stage 2 pupils will be encouraged to make a 'zoom train' from cardboard and straws, powered by a balloon. This follows on from a programme in secondary schools along the route of HS2, which encouraged pupils to look at possible routes for 'zoom rail' from London to Birmingham.

Whilst the pack contains the disclaimer 'the materials in this pack are for educational purposes only and are not intended to be a representation of any particular project', campaigners say it is clear that it represents HS2. They add that there are several references to HS2 sources and the entirety of the documents have been produced in HS2 Ltd's format, with the 'zoom train' containing HS2s' logo and 'engine from growth' slogan.

Integral

The tender document for the primary school engagement programme, which was awarded at a cost of £280,000, states: "The education programme is an integral element of HS2 Ltd's broader approach to creating skills and employment opportunities.

"It aims to educate and inform children, young adults, and their families about HS2 and the employment and training opportunities it will create and support, prioritising schools closest to the line of route, stations and depots, with a focus on schools that are in more deprived areas."

But Joe Rukin, Stop HS2 campaign manager, said: "Just when we thought HS2 Ltd couldn't sink any lower, we find they are spending over a quarter of a million on targeting primary school children along the route of HS2 for brainwashing. The concept of state-sponsored propaganda, which is tailored so children in communities impacted by HS2 must come to the conclusion HS2 is a brilliant idea, is truly Orwellian."

Three hurt in van and car smash

The scene of the crash in West Bromwich Road, Walsall, involving a Transit Van and Honda Civic car

THREE men, including a pensioner in his 70s, were taken to hospital when a car and a van crashed in Walsall. Two of the men were taken to Sandwell General Hospital while the third was taken to Birmingham's Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

Both the red Ford Transit van and silver Honda Civic involved in the crash were left with 'substantial damage'.

The driver of the Honda, who is in his 30s, was left with back, neck, chest, abdomen and arm injuries after the accident on West Bromwich Road. He was treated at the scene and stabilised by ambulance crews before being taken off to Birmingham's Queen Elizabeth Hospital to be checked for a possible head injury.

His passenger, another man in his 30s, was left with a suspected fractured arm and other more minor injures to his finger, neck and chest. He was given given pain relief before being taken to Sandwell General Hospital.

The driver of the Ford Transit van, a man in his 70s, was being cared for by his family who were at the scene when West Midlands Ambulance staff arrived.

He was checked over by paramedics and after an assessment was found to have sustained chest pain as well as lower leg injuries. He too was given pain relief before being taken to Sandwell Hospital.

An ambulance service spokesman confirmed the crash caused 'substantial damage' to both the car and the van. The incident happened around 6.20pm last Tuesday.

Festive tips to ensure pets stay out of trouble

PET owners are being advised on how to keep their animals safe over the festive period. Chain store Pets at Home, which has a branch in Saint Johns Retail Park, Wolverhampton, has offered the advice to pet owners to try and protect their beloved furry friends from harm.

Staff at the store have said that a home full of decorations, food and presents offers an array of new toys, smells and tastes for pets, but many popular Christmas items are unsafe. Wolverhampton store manager, Emma Cartwright, said: "With a little extra care and attention, you can ensure your pet has as great a Christmas as you."

The advice to pet owners is as follows: "Keep fairy lights out of reach that they can't chew through; vacuum regularly to reduce the risk of real or fake pine needles being ingested by your pet; be careful with edible decorations and chocolate gifts under the tree – chocolate contains theobromine which is toxic to dogs and other pets.

"Mince pies, Christmas cake and Christmas pudding contain raisins, which are also toxic for dogs, cooked turkey or chicken bones can splinter and cause serious issues for your pet, so do not feed them any Christmas plants like poinsettias, mistletoe, holly, amaryllis, ferns and pine sap as it is poisonous to cats and dogs."

The advice also says to keep tinsel out of reach of cats and kittens as it can cause serious internal damage and keep burning candles on high shelves or mantels where your pet can't reach.

Beauty salon plan rejected

PLANNERS refused an application to turn a semi-detached house into a beauty salon in Tipton after 'grave concerns' about parking and privacy on neighbouring properties.

The house in Horseley Heath was proposed to be turned into a family salon offering pamper parties for children, a barber's and an adult salon on the first floor. But Sandwell Council bosses refused the application following a site visit, on the grounds of it being 'out of character' and 'setting a precedent'.

Councillor Pete Allen, who objected along with residents from the next door property, said: "This change of use would cause difficulty in a nice quiet road."

Final few places left for town race

THERE are fewer than 50 places left for next year's Stafford half marathon.

The run is on March 19 and so far nearly 4,000 people have registered for the 13.1mile race. It is organised by Stafford Borough Council. Next year's capacity of 4,000 runners is up on 2016's 3,500. Runners can enter online at www.staffordhalf.com

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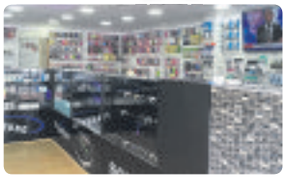

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Chase rail line misery could run until 2018

OVERCROWDING misery on the heavily criticised Chase Line could continue for the next two years, it has been revealed.

London Midland has said it will not increase the capacity on its line, which runs from Walsall to Cannock Chase, until 2018. The line has been dogged with problems in recent months, with the biggest criticism levelled at London Midland being the overcrowding on the trains.

Cannock Chase MP Amanda Milling has previously warned that if something is not done to address the overcrowding then there will be a 'serious accident or injury'. She added she was 'fearful for her safety' when travelling on an early morning service last month.

But the overcrowding could now be set to continue for another two years. In a letter to Walsall North MP David Winnick, a spokesman for London Midland said: "We have added hundreds of extra seats at peak times.

"Unfortunately, there is a national shortage of diesel trains so we can't get any more capacity until the introduction of electric services in 2018. The new service will be capable of carrying 50 per cent more passengers than our current diesel fleet."

The letter, which was penned by London Midland's head of corporate affairs Francis Thomas, was in response to Mr Winnick writing to the company's chief executive raising residents' concerns over the line.

After receiving the reply he said: "I very much doubt whether the letter which I will be sending on to constituents who wrote to me will give them any satisfaction. All the indications seem to be that no improvement at all is likely for the reasons stated, namely the shortage of diesel trains."

Safari park seeks 200 seasonal staff

A RECRUITMENT drive is being held by West Midland Safari Park for 200 seasonal workers. A variety of roles are on offer including retail and admissions, food and beverages, games, venues, learning and wildlife.

The positions are for zero-hour contracts and the work will run from February 1 to November 5. A special recruitment day will be held at the park on January 8.

The event is being held in park's Treetops Pavilion and the day will consist of two parts. Candidates will be invited to explore the many opportunities on offer and speak to those who already work at the park to find out what life is like there.

Human resources officer, Zoe Croton, said: "The start of every season is a really exciting time at the safari park We are delighted to be able to re-design our seasonal recruitment for 2017." For further information, and to register to take part in the jobs day, head online to visit the park's website at www.wmsp.co.uk/careers

Choir's festive song in aid of hospice

The Walsall choir Sing2gether

A CHRISTMAS song recorded by a Walsall choir is now on sale to raise money for St Giles Hospice.

This Time Of Year, performed by Sing2gether, is available to download from Amazon Music, Google Play or iTunes. The song was composed by Sing2gether's musician Stuart Crossen and choir vocal coach Mike Brereton, who is also a singer, songwriter and performer.

Sing2gether is a group of about 60 singers from two choirs, which rehearse separately in Pelsall and Streetly and then come together for recordings and concerts. Mr Brereton said: "We do cover versions the majority of the time, but Stuart and I came up with the idea to create an original song for the choir to sing. We decided that a song with a theme of hope, strength and family would be ideal for Christmas."

"The message of the song is that we're here to support each other – that was really important to us. Many people join community choirs having experienced loss of loved ones as it gives them the opportunity to make new friends."The choirs started learning the song in the summer and after just a few weeks of rehearsals recorded the track. More information is available by visiting the St Giles Hospice website www.stgileshospice.com/

People can hear the song performed live at Sing2gether's Christmas concert – which will also include plenty of festive songs to sing along to – on Friday December 16 from 7.30pm at Pelsall Community Centre.

Tickets are available from the Sing2gether website at www.sing2gether.co.uk and donations to St Giles Hospice will be welcome on the night.

Winson Green prison riot worst since Strangeways

HUNDREDS of inmates took over four wings of Winson Green Prison in what experts called the worst jail riot since Strangeways in 1990.

One inmate was reportedly seriously injured as prisoners broke free, smashing their way through the Victorian buildings, wrecking offices and lighting fires.

The cause of the trouble has not yet been established, with reports blaming a lack of TV, closure of the gym and privileges being withdrawn. The 1,450-capacity HMP Birmingham is run by private firm G4S, which handed control back to the Prison Service by mid-afternoon on Friday as the riots escalated, with up to 600 men involved.

Later, the police established a secure cordon around the main gate. Smoke had been seen rising from the buildings. Sources say a prisoner took keys from a guard just after 9am, which sparked a protocol that meant prison officers had to withdraw from two wings. A source said the problems began with lights being broken and inmates controlling fire hoses.

Officers tried to get as many prisoners locked in their cells as possible to contain the problems but one guard was threatened with what appeared to be a used syringe.

Control

Then, according to prison affairs blogger Alex Cavendish, a second inmate went up behind the officer and snatched his keys. He described the incident as 'probably the most serious riot in a B category prison since Strangeways' in 1990. Prisoners used smuggled phones to post pictures of themselves in captured riot gear, captioned 'the lags are taking over'.

By 3pm, prisoners had control of four of the jail's 11 wings as reinforcements from HMPs Oakwood and Rye Hill, near Rugby, were called in, along with dog units.

A 'rapid reaction' Tornado Squad, made up of former members of the SAS and specialist officers, was seen entering the prison in the late afternoon in a bid to restore order.

Shortly afterwards, the Prison Service said the incident had been 'contained'.

The Prisoner Officers Association (POA) confirmed no officers were injured.

A police helicopter circled the prison while paramedics wore full body armour to enter the prison. Mike Rolfe, of the Prisoner Officers Association, said: "We have raised serious concerns about the ongoing state of prisons."

Christmas cracker at the Valley

Santa Claus welcomes visitors to his grotto at Sandwell's 'Christmas at the Valley' event

HE'S on his way! Santa, or at least one of helpers, has been stopping off in Sandwell for the very first Christmas at the Valley.

The festive extravaganza is the first Christmas event of this scale to be held in the borough, with organisers hailing it as a success. It runs until Christmas Eve.

Councillor Richard Marshall, Sandwell Council's cabinet member for leisure, said the event had brought back 'the old-fashioned magic of Christmas'. "It took us six months to organise it,'' said Councillor Marshall. "It is the first time we've organised something this big and there's so much more than our previous festivities included."

A variety of fun activities and attractions are available at the Christmas extravaganza, including craft stalls, treasure hunts and festive food and drink.

In addition, there is the chance to meet Santa Claus in his grotto and receive a gift, write him a letter, and meet his reindeer and other animals at Sandwell Park Farm.

The experience also includes a festive train ferrying passengers around the site, a mini German market and Christmas trees around the site.

Online bookings are still being taken at www.sandwell.gov.uk/christmasatthevalley

NEWS IN BRIEF

Record number of PPI claims on way

THE financial ombudsman expects to handle record numbers of payment protection insurance complaints next year as the fallout from the mis-selling scandal continues.

In its proposed plans and budget for 2017-18, the Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS) anticipates it will resolve 360,000 PPI complaints during that year and it proposes to resource its operations based on these expected levels. The service has received 1.6 million complaints about PPI in total – and it still gets around 3,000 new complaints a week.

MPs in line for a pay rise of 1.4pc

MPS are set for a 1.4 per cent pay rise – well above the one per cent cap imposed on public sector workers.

The rise from £74,962 to £76,011, due to take effect in April 2017, follows another cap-busting increase of 1.3 per cent earlier this year.

It comes two years after a10 per cent hike from £67,000 to £74,000 in 2015, recommended by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority. The announcement is likely to anger nurses, police and teachers, whose rises have been limited to a maximum one per cent for four years.

Two thirds are on pricey tariffs

THREE quarters of British Gas customers are on the firm's most expensive tariff and could save £174 by switching, new Ofgem figures show.

Some 74 per cent of British Gas customers, or 6,639,056 households, are paying an average £1,044 a year for their energy, and could save £129 on a cheaper deal, the regulator's first company league table shows. The table compares the most expensive standard tariffs with the cheapest deals on the market.

£250k target set for addicts' charity

A BIRMINGHAM charity that helps people beat their addiction to drink and drugs has launched a new funding drive to secure £250,000 in the next 12 years. The announcement by Changes UK, based in Digbeth, Birmingham, was backed by TV star Russell Brand.

The charity wants to launch an additional CQC-registered detox facility in Birmingham, capable of helping 100 people every year. "Changing pain into purpose is the charity's strapline and I really like that," said Russell.

Brum flights to Porto

AIRLINE Monarch has announced a new flight to Porto from Birmingham Airport. Flights to the Portuguese citystart from April, and it joins Stockholm as new destinations.

Chief executive Paul Kehoe said: "We are sure it will be a popular summer route."

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THE BEST OF PETER RHODES

MORE weather-forecast English. This week's warning was of "murky-mizzly."

A READER says she is disappointed to learn from this column that pansexuality has nothing to do with pans. She was working on her debut novel, Fifty Shades of Stew.

WHOPPERS of our time. I heard one pundit describe the brought-forward hike in council tax to pay for social care as "a temporary rise." Yeah, right.

BUT the council tax had to be the target, didn't it? Freezing it for several years had become a totem of Toryism, a buffer protecting the property-rich from the demands of Britain's uncontrollable welfare bill. The real hit will come when Westminster re-bands the nation's homes based on today's inflated values and the most desirable addresses will be in Much Weeping in the Shires.

THE curse of predictive texting. A friend and I provided ukulele-and-songs entertainment for a Christmas party under our performing names of Two Old Pluckers. We appeared in the programme as Two Old Plonkers. Our complaint was not upheld.

"EU leaders richly deserved Brexit and British voters were right to give them it." Historian and columnist Niall Ferguson, admitting he was wrong to argue against Brexit and is now relieved to be "back on the right side." There is plenty of time for all you other sinners to repent.

SO farewell, Ian McCaskill. I never interviewed the BBC weather forecaster, who recently died this week, but he suddenly appeared in the office in Broadcasting House many years ago where I was interviewing the chief forecaster, Bill Giles. McCaskill burst in like a busy little shrew, sorting through some papers while robustly denouncing some ****ing **** he had just fallen out with. It was all light-hearted but to hear the housewives' favourite effing and blinding like a navvy was a bit of a shock. As I wrote at the time, it was like seeing the Pope spit.

OH, Yuletide foottide. I have invested in a pair of cargo trousers which are not only cheaper than jeans but harder-wearing and look much better on rumps of a certain age. They come with many pockets in which you can lose things. Some pairs have a special pouch for knee pads, which must be very useful when you're begging the kids not to put you in a home.

FIRST cracker of the season: "What happened to the hyena who swallowed an Oxo cube? He became a laughing stock." Ye Gods, another 10 days of this.

Don't miss Peter Rhodes every Monday to Friday in your Express & Star

National Express to put up bus fares

SOME fares on National Express buses will increase in the new year, it has been announced.

The adult maximum single ticket on the buses will increase four per cent from £2.30 to £2.40.

Overall, out of 32 fares provided by National Express, which also operates Midland Metro, 19 are to go up, with up to 50 per cent being added to some ticket prices. A dozen tickets are to stay at the same price, while the off-peak adult short-hop ticket will go down from £1.90 to £1.50. All adult West Midlands travel cards are set for an increase.

The increases will come into effect from January 2 and National Express maintains that the fare increases will go towards pay raises for employees, which they aim to do every year.

A spokesperson for National Express said: "We continue to invest in providing better services for our passengers, and we are planning to buy more state-of-the-art Platinum buses, following on from already high customer satisfaction rates across our current Platinum routes.

"Half of the new buses will have hybrid engines to improve air quality across the region, and we are also refurbishing hundreds of our other buses to bring them up to Crimson standard. From spring 2017 we are also fitting brand new ticket machines in all our buses, speeding up journey times for our passengers and giving them the choice to pay with contactless bank cards, smart phones and watches as well as with cash.

"Over half of our costs go on wages for our 5,500 staff who do a great job." For details, go to nxbus.co.uk

Roadworks to stop for festive getaway

By Nick Humphreys

ROADWORKS in the West Midlands are among schemes covering 448 miles being completed or lifted during the festive period.

Highways England will finish on 115 miles in the Midlands – leaving 98 per cent of its 9,534-mile network free of roadworks in time for the Christmas getaway.

The authority is completing 407 and suspending 41 miles of roadworks by 6am tomorrow (Friday) until Tuesday, January 3.

Among work being stopped will be that between junctions six and eight of the M6 near Erdington. Two miles of roadworks will be lifted for the festive period.

Highways England operations director Nick Harris said: "This Christmas bank holiday, we're helping drivers with their journeys by clearing roadworks on most of our motorways and major A-roads.

Prepared

"Our traffic officers will also be on patrol working to clear any incidents, the vast majority of which will be dealt with in under an hour.

"We're asking people to be prepared before setting off.

"Make sure you have everything you need for your journey should there be any delays. Check before and during your journey, and also make sure you're aware of the signs and signals on motorways."

By suspending or completing roadworks, more lanes will be open, and many speed restrictions will be lifted.

The news comes after an online poll showed that Sir David Attenborough, chef Gordon Ramsay and singer Kylie Minogue have all been chosen as the potential favourite passengers for festive car journeys.

The survey also shows that 50 per cent of drivers will be travelling more than 50 miles to visit friends and relatives at Christmas.

More information can be found on the Traffic England website or the information line on 0300 123 5000.

Congregation boosts toy appeal

Reverend Rachel Frank and church stewards Linda Laing and Dorothy Clive of Great Barr Methodist Church with Councillor Simon Hackett

CHURCHGOERS have given generously to a festive toy appeal.

Members of the congregation at Great Barr Methodist Church have boosted the Sandwell Council's Children's Service Christmas toy appeal for Looked After Children.

Councillor Simon Hackett, cabinet member for Children's Services, received the donations on behalf of Sandwell's Looked After Children & Young People, including donations from organiser Dorothy Clive.

"It's great to know that people are thinking about the children and young people at this time of year," Councillor Hackett said.

"We are always very grateful for public support for our fostering service."

Great Barr Methodist Church has been supporting Sandwell's Looked After Children for several years and their generous donations of toys and games for children of all ages are a real boost to the children who will receive them and their foster carers.

Councillor Hackett added: "Not everyone can be a foster carer, but this is a great example of how people can help, whether it's making a donation or simply spreading the word. So if you have an interest in working with children, but you're not sure about fostering, please get in touch. Our team are always willing to help and advise."

To contact Sandwell Fostering Service call 0800 358 0899 or visit www.sandwell.gov.uk/fostering or search Facebook for 'Sandwell Fostering'

Workers at Post Office branches in walkouts

POST Office workers in the Black Country are taking part in five days of strike action – including Christmas Eve – in a dispute over jobs, pensions and branch closures.

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) is embroiled in a long-running dispute over job losses, the closure of a final salary pension scheme and the franchising of Crown Post Offices, the larger branches usually sited in high streets.

On December 3, staff at John Street, Willenhall, and Darwall Street, Walsall, ere among hundreds in the country who took part in a 24-hour walkout.

CWU assistant secretary Andy Furey said: "All of the blame for this unfortunate turn of events is 100 per cent down to the intransigence of the company, who have launched an unprecedented attack on the jobs, job security, and pensions of thousands of hard-working and loyal Post Office workers."

Post Office director Kevin Gilliland said: "We are extremely disappointed that they prefer to resort to calls for strike action and we will be reviewing our position in light of this development. Our focus must be on supporting our customers, who rely on us at Christmas more than ever.

"We want to reassure customers that if further strike action takes place next week at least 97 per cent of our 11,600 branches will not be involved. It will be business as usual in almost all of our network, with over 50,000 Post Office people on hand."

Arson-hit centre to be demolished

A FORMER community centre will be demolished after it was destroyed by arson and vandalism.

The run-down building in the Black Patch area of Smethwick, previously known as the Merry Hill Community Centre, had been vacant for years.

Councillor Paul Moore, cabinet member for regeneration at Sandwell Council, said officers were planning to demolish the building in the new year because it had been 'completely destroyed' by vandalism.

He said: "In recent times, the building has been a regular target for vandals and has attracted anti-social behaviour. Various attempts to secure the building against vandals have proved to be unsuccessful.

"The only thing to be done now is for the council to demolish it."

Building society hands out cash to charities

FIVE charities received cash from Tipton & Coseley Building Society.

Its charitable foundation awarded cheques collectively worth £3,288 to Acorns Children's Hospice, Barnardos, Beanstalk, Christians Against Poverty and Deaf Blind UK.

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Jobs boost in retail site's plans to expand

EXPANSION plans for Oldbury Green Retail Park, which will bring new shops and jobs, have been revealed.

Two new units will be created, while an existing store will be expanded, under the plans. Site owners Blackrock said the move would 'continue the wave of investment' at the complex and that they were keen to increase the number of stores.

The firm said the expansion would make Oldbury more attractive to shoppers. Bosses revealed they had already received interest for the new units at the retail park which has seen the likes of Costa Coffee and Smyths Toys move in over recent years.

Existing businesses will also benefit from the expansion. Homesense will be extended as the shop is in need of a bigger space to display items.

Thomas Cook is also set to leave its current unit for one of the new stores. Another new store will be built next to Costa Coffee.

A design statement submitted with the plans said: "In recent years, Blackrock has invested significant capital in upgrading and refurbishing the site, and this has facilitated improvements in the appearance of the retail park and has enabled Costa Coffee and Smyths Toys to open new units, which has enhanced the quality and choice of retail provision at Oldbury Green Retail Park.

"The application proposals seek to continue the wave of investment at this site, to enhance the offer and attractiveness of Oldbury town centre."

Over-50s relying on auction sites

RESEARCH has shown that more than half of over-50s in the Midlands are turning to auction sites to bring in extra cash.

The research from specialist lender and savings bank Aldermore found an increasing number of new businesses are being started by the over-50s.

According to the research, over-55s are finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet, with just over a fifth saying they need to generate extra income due to high living costs.

The extra cash generated is being used to pay bills, go on holiday and reinvest into savings accounts for day-to-day living.

A total of 56 per cent generate extra income from selling on internet websites.

Cardiac arrest at wheel

A MOTORIST was taken to hospital after suffering a cardiac arrest in his car. Paramedics in an ambulance who came across the vehicle in Kings Heath, Birmingham, at 9.45pm on Tuesday last week while en route to another incident smashed the window to get to the man, who was slumped in the driver's seat.

Honour for sexual health service founder

Brook founder Helen Brook

THE founder of Sandwell and Dudley's sexual health service has been honoured in the BBC Radio 4 Woman's Hour Power List for her crusade to help unmarried women in the 1960s.

Helen Brook, founder of Brook – the UK's leading sexual health and wellbeing charity for young people – was one of seven women named in this year's list which celebrates women who have made the biggest impact on women's lives over the past seven decades.

The first Brook clinic opened in 1964 with the aim of offering accessible support and contraception to unmarried women and reducing the number of illegal abortions.

This clinic, unlike the Family Planning Association where she had previously worked, was not required to confine its service to married women or women who could prove that they were very shortly to be married.

Until her death in 1997, despite severe eye problems in later life, she retained an keen interest in and supported the activities of the centres.

Today Brook has nine services in Sandwell and Dudley, providing local people with free and confidential information, contraception, pregnancy testing, advice and counselling, as well as testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections. The service is used by more than 250,000 young people under 25 across the UK.

Alison Hamnett, operations manager for Sandwell and Dudley, said: "It's because of Helen Brook's hard work and bravery that young people in Sandwell and Dudley today are able to access free and confidential sexual health support and services."

Partnership picks up top industry award

A SANDWELL Council partnership which is delivering millions of pounds worth of improvements to council homes has won a prestigious industry award.

The council and its partners – Keepmoat, Lovell, Vinci Facilities and Wates Living Space – were honoured for their social value work. The partnership scooped the Delivering Social Value Award at the National Federation of Builders Awards.

It recognises the added value being brought into Sandwell through its multi-million pound council housing improvement scheme, which has been improving thousands of council homes and delivering improvements to seven high-rise blocks.

Contributions to the community include more than 30 visits to local schools providing health and safety talks, contributing activities to maths and design technology lessons, providing on-site work placements and job interview techniques to boost students' job-finding skills.

Workforce

The partnership has also created more than 40 apprenticeships, recruited 40 per cent of its workforce from local people and invests millions of pounds in small and medium-sized businesses through the supply chain.

In addition, free materials and labour offered through the partnership's Hands-on Help scheme means 12 Sandwell community facilities have had buildings improved for the benefit of their users.

Improvements have included redecorated community rooms, new fitted and redecorated kitchens and replacement toilet facilities.

The judging panel said: "The Sandwell Partnership should be very proud of the work they have completed and the individuals and groups they have inspired."

Sandwell's cabinet member for housing, Councillor Kerrie Carmichael, said: "I am delighted that Sandwell and its partners have been nationally recognised yet again for the great work they are carrying out, both in our homes and our communities.

"The contributions they have made outside of working on improving our council homes would not have been possible otherwise."

It is the second accolade for the partnership as earlier in the year it won the Value category at another national industry award scheme – the Construction Excellence Awards.

Office worker rescued from blaze

Emergency vehicles at the scene of the blaze in Bearwood Road, Smethwick

A MAN was rescued from a first floor high street building following a large blaze in Smethwick.

Fire crews rescued the man who had climbed through an office window onto a ledge in Bearwood Road, following the fire last Wednesday afternoon.

Businesses nearby were affected as water used to quell the flames damaged properties. Crews were called to the scene at around noon. Eve Greenhouse, watch Commander from Oldbury fire station, said: "We rescued one guy from the first floor. He was okay and not injured. He had been working in a first floor office. No other person was trapped or injured."

She added the fire had begun at the rear of one of the buildings. The cause was yet to be established.

Studio Omega Hair was one of the affected businesses. Salon owner Dawn Mccalla said: "My shop had recently been refurbished. We were working to get the shop finished before Christmas."

Ms Mccalla added she was grateful her 24-year-old pregnant daughter was not at work at the time. She estimated the salon should be reopened this week. Water from the first floor had leaked onto her equipment and newly installed floor.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Family tribute to hit-and-run victim

A MAN killed in a hit and run has been named as father-of-three Paul Foster.

Mr Foster, a 61-year-old grandfather, was walking near the Perry Barr dog track on Aldridge Road, Birmingham at 6.25am on Saturday when he was struck by a vehicle. He was on the way to the bus depot where he worked as a driver.

Paul Foster

Paying tribute, a family statement described him as an absolute rock, a loving husband, special father and 'the best granddad any kid could wish for'.

A 58-year-old man has been arrested in connection with Mr Foster's death but police are continuing to appeal for information. Call 101.

3,000 apply for jobs with police

MORE than 3,000 people have applied for 1,150 jobs at West Midlands Police in the force's latest recruitment drive.

And a third of candidates are from black or ethnic minority backgrounds.

The force is recruiting 800 officers, 150 police community support officers (PCSOs) and 200 specialist staff over the next three years.

Police and Crime Commissioner David Jamieson and Chief Constable Dave Thompson are keen to see the force's staff and officers reflect the ethnic makeup of the region.

The starting salary for new officers will be £22,896 with a minimum of 22 days' annual leave.

Police seize 300 cannabis plants

A MAN was arrested and about 300 cannabis plants were seized during a drugs raid in Dudley.

Officers from Sandwell neighbourhood taskforce issued a warrant at the address on Saturday.

They released a picture on Twitter inside the property, which showed rows and rows of plants. The officers tweeted: "Sandwell NTF officers seize approximately 300 cannabis plants and arrest a male from an address in Dudley on 17/12/16."

Fundraisers bristle with enthusiasm

STAFF members from NHS Solihull CCG are ditching the razor for a month and letting their facial hair grow in order to raise funds and awareness for Bowel Cancer UK.

Decembeard is a national fundraising campaign encouraging men to get sponsored to grow a beard in order to raise awareness and money to support vital research and lifesaving work to stop bowel cancer.

To join the campaign, sign up at bowelcanceruk.org.uk/decembeard

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IN MY VIEW
with Mark Andrews

Anyone got a spare library to give away?

THE Black Country Living Museum is looking for an unused former library to add to its open-air village. Something tells me that in the current climate they won't have to look too far to find one.

And there will be a nice art gallery and a few swimming pools available soon...

❒ ❒ ❒

INTERESTINGLY, one of the reasons given by Dudley Council for closing swimming pools is the declining number of people who use them.

Now that I can well believe. Indeed, I used to be a regular user of the pool at Dudley Leisure Centre until 11 years ago or so, when I stopped going altogether. Why? Because they stopped opening to the general public in the evening, to accommodate a swimming club from another centre they had closed.

❒ ❒ ❒

A POLL in our sister paper the Express & Star found that 75 per cent of readers think shops should be banned from opening on Boxing Day.

As something of a libertarian, I'm not a fan of banning many things. But then I think back to the days when I used to work Boxing Day, and the distraction of the inconsiderate shoppers who not only considered it their inalienable right to park on our office car park near a well-known shopping mall, but also to climb over the fence next to the window just to get to the shops more quickly.

Can you imagine how annoying that used to be? Does anybody really need to go shopping that badly?

Still if 75 per cent of the population want Boxing Day shopping banned, then maybe the shopping malls will be deserted on December 26. Either that, or our readers are far more sensible than the rest of the population.

❒ ❒ ❒

The Football Association is "out of balance", filled with "elderly white men" and in desperate need of reform. So say four, er, elderly white men, who all used to be senior executives of the FA before stepping down for one reason or another.

Greg Dyke, David Bernstein, David Davies and Lord Triesman want the Government to step in and add impose a bit of diversity into the mix. Yippee, never mind Brexit, let's nationalise football.

I suspect if you did a straw poll of most fans about what is wrong with football, the main bugbears would probably revolve around there being too much money in the game, too much of it going to a cartel of half a dozen clubs dotted around London and the north-west, and the persistent under-achievement of the national team.

I bet not one of them would be calling for a task force headed by John Major or Gordon Brown.

The old Elephant & Castle pub in Wolverhampton

Gas Showroom, decorated for the Coronation in 1937

The site of the former Parish's Restaurant, West Bromwich

Historic buildings to be talk of the town

£10m of Lottery funding could enable landmark buildings to find a new home at a popular attraction. **ROB COX** reports

HISTORIC buildings from across the region could resurrected at the Black Country Living Museum under multi-million pound plans to create a 1940-60s town.

Landmark community buildings, much-loved pubs and industrial sites are among those which have been targeted by bosses at the popular tourist attraction.

While some would be taken down brick-by-brick and then rebuilt at the Dudley site, others which no longer exist would be recreated using archive images and information.

The proposed attraction is reliant upon £10 million of Heritage Lottery funding and a bid has been submitted for the cash.

If successful work could begin in 2018 and 93 jobs would be created – with hundreds more while work is carried out.

Demolition

Among the buildings identified for the 1940-60s town is Woodside Library in Stourbridge Road, Dudley, which has lain empty and boarded up since it was closed in 2008 under council cost-cutting measures.

Also being lined-up for 'translocation' is the West Bromwich Gas Showroom in the town's High Street, and the neighbouring Parish's Restaurant – both of which have been scheduled for demolition.

The showroom was badly damaged by a Blitz raid in 1940.

The Elephant & Castle pub in Wolverhampton was controversially demolished in 2001 but could be revived as a 1950s watering hole to inform visitors about changes in social attitudes towards drinking and social life.

A bowling green could also form part of the attraction, as could a brickworks modelled on the former Harris & Pearson site in Quarry Bank. The museum's chief executive Andrew Lovett said he was excited about the proposed town, plans for which are the culmination of a major research project.

He said: "This would be a historic development centred on the 1940s through to the 1960 and which would include a town and also great industrial representation.

"The buildings we have identified would be clustered and we have had great fun designing the streetscape. When was the last time someone got to design a town in the Black Country?

"We think we have got a very compelling bid for the funding but you have to recognise it is a very competitive environment in which we are seeking the money.

"The message I want to get across which has come about from consultations is about the amount of support we have had for the development from the people of the Black Country. It is hugely heartening for us. It is easy to forget and take that sort of thing for granted but it is a real boost to think we are doing the right thing."

Another building which has been identified for the town is William Griffin & Sons, a chain-making firm in Woods Lane, Cradley, which has also been earmarked for demolition by Sandwell Council.

It would be used to demonstrate the industry's move to merchandised production and the globalisation of trade during the post-war period.

But Mr Lovett said he was most excited by the prospect of relocating Woodside Library with action having being sought by campaigners for several years.

He added: "Having had discussion with the local authority we are aware there is a covenant on that building from the Earl of Dudley who wanted it to be maintained for public use.

"So if that can be brought here it would be great and it would satisfy that covenant.

"It is a large and very striking building and is very much of the style we are after for what we want to create."

A decision on the funding will be made in the spring. If successful, the £10m would be used to create the town, a new visitor centre and car park, as well as the extension of the museum's tram line.

There are also plans to turn the current Rolfe Street Entrance Building into a new learning centre to enable the development of a new learning programme.

Mr Lovett said the scheme could create 93 jobs at the museum, 58 at other Black Country firms and around 450 while construction takes place.

The Harris & Pearson building, in Brettell Lane, Brierley Hill

Woodside Library, Dudley, is earmarked for 'translocation'

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New 'city' signs for station are a waste

I READ recently that the long-awaited rebuilding of Wolverhampton Railway Station has finally been approved and work is already in hand for temporary road access via Corn Hill.

It was with some surprise, therefore, to be standing on Platform 1 on December 6 to see outside contractors replacing all the 'Wolverhampton' signs on canopies with new vinyl type signs saying 'City of Wolverhampton' and there are at least eight per platform.

This sort of signage change is not needed by passengers, so would not be undertaken by train operators.

It must be Wolverhampton Council.

The overall cost of this 'vanity exercise' will no doubt run into many hundreds of pounds.

So perhaps a council officer could explain why money is being wasted on a building soon to be pulled down, at a time when basic essential services are being cut, by a council which has no money.

MR K HALE
Wolverhampton

Lighting up road issues

AS with so many letters already sent to this page, I have to write about the dangerous, inconsiderate and stupid drivers who seem determined to drive in the dark with no lights on.

How with modern technology they still seem none the wiser is beyond me, and even when you flash them to tell them that they have no lights on, they stare back as though you have committed a crime. I have also seen police cars drive past them without taking any action.

It's particularly more dangerous with the darker nights at this time of year with school children and Xmas shoppers laden with goods attempting to cross roads. I was taught never to drive in such a way as to hinder, cause danger or be inconsiderate to other road users. That instruction is now laughable.

SHAUN HARRISON
West Bromwich

Antics of reality TV in bad taste

I FULLY agree with Neville Broadbent's letter of December 5 regarding 'I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here'! I have only ever watched a small part of one episode some years ago. Then some poor creature was being eaten, but the really sickening part about it was the total disregard for the suffering of the animal.

The message being portrayed is that unless an animal has the 'cute factor' it has no value. Is this really what we want our children to believe? You try to bring them up to have respect and consideration for all creatures and then this revolting barbarism is churned out as entertainment.

Everyone involved in the making of this programme should be thoroughly ashamed.

I am amazed that the RSPCA have not done something about it. Of course though the other message being sent out loud and clear is that if enough money or fame is involved basically anything goes.

SUSAN CLARKE
Stourbridge

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POST
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Chronicle Editorial,
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Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES

EMAIL
sandwell.chronicle@expressandstar.co.uk

Letters should be brief and MUST include name, address and telephone number number. The Editor reserves the right to condense letters.

Tories destroying fabric of society

YOUR article by Heather Large, regarding nearly 1,000 homeless in the Black Country, really brings it home how the electorate of this country needs to start fighting back against a Tory Government which is destroying the very fabric of our society.

In Walsall, political control seems to change back and forwards – and in my opinion certainly is not in the interests of the people.

Councillor Mike Bird comments as to 'being surprised that there are 569 homeless in Walsall alone', this is a typical answer when a politician either finds themselves on the spot, or do not wish to admit that they have played a part in the situation. Councillor Bird has been around for many years. He is a very astute Leader of Walsall Tory Party, and in my opinion knows what is going on not only in Walsall, but throughout the West Midlands area.

Surely, he has to accept responsibility that his party ruled Walsall Council for over a decade, and 'on his watch' the authority agreed to the transfer of the housing stock to outside bodies, and the winding down of adult social services.

It is clear that the present administration now has an impossible task of 'how to maintain basic services' in Walsall, without even considering the fate of the 569 homeless referred to earlier.

PAUL AGG
Wednesbury

Rail increase not justified

RAIL fares to go up 2.3 per cent – why? When so many rail franchises are failing abysmally, the Government talks of investment then surely the people raking off the profits should be the people investing the cash.

It seems the public just can't win, they pay through their taxes, and then they are punished through the ticket pricing policies, and what do they get, overcrowded trains and delays.

Rail operating companies should not be allowed to get away with it, we want our railways back.

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Year of delays on way as estate utilities work begins

DRIVERS are facing traffic misery on a main road running through a Black Country town – with roadworks set to last for up to a whole year.

Temporary traffic lights will go up on Doulton Road in Rowley Regis, during the first week of the new year as work is carried out to connect 200 new homes to gas, water and electricity supplies.

The work, being done by utility companies, will get under way on January 3 and will also cause disruption for residents already living on the road.

The connections will supply 216 new homes being built on four new housing developments.

Developers Kier Homes, Countryside and Smart Build Solutions are currently building homes on Doulton Road and there is another small development of two homes being built on Dudley Road.

Motorists have been told there will be delays on the route and that it might be best for them to avoid the road altogether while the work is ongoing.

Supplies

Sandwell Council's roads boss Councillor David Hosell said: "These are essential works to connect these new homes to water, sewers, gas and electricity supplies.

"We really need new homes built in Sandwell but with that comes the job of connecting these sites up to utilities.

"This will cause some inconvenience in the area and I'd ask people to be patient. It's something that is unavoidable.

"I am sure the utility companies and their contractors will make sure this work as swiftly as they can, but it's a big job."

The housing development is being built on land previously occupied by a logistics company, vacant land belonging to Springfield Primary School and a small piece of land that belonged to the council.

By Simon Stone

The biggest development is to build 188 homes on the former haulage Norbert Dentressangle site off Doulton Road.

Sandwell Council granted permission for the demolition of existing buildings once used by the French logistics firm, and for the construction of a mix of properties over 12.8 acres of land.

The derelict site has been the target for anti-social behaviour, and previously described as a 'grot spot' by ward councillor Susan Eaves.

Welcoming the application when it was submitted, Councillor Eaves said: "It's good news for the area, as that's been a grot spot for a while now.

"It does need something doing there.

"I think it's well needed and we've been waiting for it to come forward for a while.

"I think it's been empty for two or three years and we've had travellers there at one time.

"There's also been a lot of graffiti – it is a real grot spot."

On land adjacent to Springfield Primary School, 20 new homes are also being built.

Schools' praise for Teamworx scheme

The Mayor of Sandwell, Councillor Julie Webb with representatives from organisations involved in Teamworx

SCHOOLS have praised a unique Sandwell scheme to keep scores of vulnerable children out of trouble.

Police, fire and council services set up Teamworx to help older primary school children in West Bromwich and Smethwick. Teamworx aims to raise self-esteem, improve confidence and prevent entry into the criminal justice system either as offenders or victims.

Since the scheme started last June almost 100 children have benefited and now organisers are aiming to roll it out across the borough.

As part of Teamworx, children aged between eight and ten attend approximately eight full day sessions over a six-week period where they learn how to be part of a team. There are currently 12 children on the Smethwick programme and 12 on the West Bromwich one.

The headteacher of a primary school where two pupils needed additional help said: "Both children had an unbelievable change in attitude, behaviour and responsibility. They developed very positive attitudes at school towards adults and work. "Both boys felt they have really benefited from the Boot Camp and have suggested that other children be given an opportunity to experience the support and workshops that were on offer."

Pc Jon Hewett, from Soho and Victoria Neighbourhood Policing Team, said: "The scheme has had success with a lot of young children and the feedback from schools is very good. The vision is to roll the programme out into each town in Sandwell if we can get funding."

Courier was checking his trailer

A MAN who was killed in a crash on the M6 near Walsall had stopped when there was 'no hard shoulder' to 'check his trailer', an inquest heard.

Mr Marston

Anthony Marston died on the M6 northbound between junctions 10 and 10a on August 21. The family man from Leegomery, Telford, worked as a courier, and was driving a Mercedes E300 estate towing a trailer loaded with a Peugeot Partner van at the time.

A pre-inquest hearing at Black Country Coroners Court yesterday, heard how Mr Marston had stopped to check his trailer before being hit minutes later.

Senior Coroner, Zafar Siddique, said: "He was driving a Mercedes on the M6 Northbound between junction 10 and 10a. He was carrying a trailer with a van

"All the lanes were running and there was no hard shoulder.

"He stopped and checked the trailer and after about two minutes vehicles passed him, but a HGV collided with the stationary trailer and he was caught between the Mercedes and the trailer. Sadly he died due to the injuries from this."

A post-mortem identified his cause of death as multiple, severe, traumatic injuries.

Due to ongoing police inquiries into the incident, the inquest was adjourned until January 20.

Mr Siddique explained where they currently were with police inquiries.

He said: "At the previous inquest the police were currently undergoing lines of investigation by viewing CCTV and getting witness statements. Since then they have returned to me to say that the vast majority of the reconstruction is now complete and the matter has been sent to the CPS."

Sandwell Markets Christmas Trading 2016

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For details of opening times,
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Sandwell
Metropolitan Borough Council

Filming kicks off on the Duncan Edwards movie

Actor James Ayling as Duncan Edwards during the filming of The Boy Who Had It All about the Dudley-born football legend

THE shirt is Manchester United, the player is Duncan Edwards – Dudley's much loved footballing son.

Actor James Ayling is playing the sporting hero in a low-budget film being shot in the town. The 24-year-old from Sheffield certainly looks the part. The film — The Boy Who Had It All – focuses on the life of Edwards, from growing up in Dudley to his success at Manchester United.

The footballer, who also played for England, died from injuries sustained in the Munich Air Disaster in 1958, when aged just 21. Yorkshireman James, who now lives in Essex, was chosen for the role over 40 other applicants for the film, which has a budget of £5,000 after a successful fundraising project.

Although he can boast a similar athletic body thanks to semi-pro appearances in hockey, filmmaker Marcus Distant said his actor's main difficulty was picking the Black Country accent.

The movie maker said: "The one thing we have had to work on is his accent, which at first came across quite northern. But, after some work we've got him sounding like a Dudley man."

Duncan Edwards – 1950s football hero

Sandwich maker fined over hygiene offences

A BUSINESSMAN who ran a Sandwell sandwich-making company has been ordered to pay £13,000 in fines and costs after admitting food hygiene offences.

Manpreet Singh Dosanjh pleaded guilty at Wolverhampton Crown Court to 15 charges relating to the cleanliness of the premises and other food hygiene issues and received a six-month prison sentence suspended for 24 months.

Dosanjh, whose Tividale-based business was at one point producing up to 3,000 sandwiches a day, was also disqualified from being a director of a company for five years. An order banning him from running a food business remains in place.

The court heard that Dosanjh, of Wellington Road, Bilston, initially ran Fresh Bites as proprietor before he made the business into a limited company, Fresh Bite Sandwiches Ltd, of which he was sole director.

The business in Dudley Road West produces pre-packed sandwiches that are then distributed nationally for sale.

Procedures

Seven of the charges were heard in August by magistrates, who referred the case to crown court for sentencing following Dosanjh's guilty pleas. Meanwhile, Dosanjh was charged with eight other offences.

Dosanjh, aged 25, admitted all 15 offences in court on December 2.

The court fined him £8,000 in total for failing to have permanent procedures relating to food hygiene principles between December 2014 and August 2016.

He was ordered to pay £5,000 costs plus a £120 victim surcharge.

Councillor Preet Gill, Sandwell Council's cabinet member for public health and protection, said: "Our environmental health officers worked tirelessly with Mr Dosanjh to try to improve standards. However, he repeatedly failed to implement and maintain adequate systems for stock control, waste, cleaning and contamination risks.

"The council was therefore left with no choice but to take action on these failures."

Bringing families together

Nargis Bostan, of Sandwell College, Lisa Bird, from West Midlands Police CTU, Councillor Syeda Khatun, Jane Bailey, of West Midlands Police, Sandwell, Raqia Akhtar, from Voices of the Hijab Project and Sarah Hewitt-Clarkson, head of Anderton Park School, Birmingham

WOMEN from different communities in Sandwell joined forces to bring families together and help tackle extremism and radicalisation.

Held at Tipton Muslim Community Centre, in partnership with the Bangladeshi Women's Association, the Our Families Our Future meeting had guest speakers addressing a range of safeguarding issues.

These included West Midlands Police, a school headteacher, Black Country Women's Aid (formerly Sandwell Women's Aid), Kaleidoscope Plus and Voices of the Hijab Project.

The event also addressed safeguarding against extremism and radicalisation in communities and on the internet. Councillor Syeda Khatun, Sandwell Council deputy leader and cabinet member for neighbourhoods and communities, said: "It was the first meeting of its kind and gave women from different communities the chance to get together and talk about how they can protect the families they care about.

"Issues around extremism, radicalisation from the internet and how to nurture and protect family life were also discussed.

"Lots of women who came along said how much they valued the opportunity to meet together and talk about these sensitive issues as well as listening to some really informative speakers."

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Sun 25th Dec Christmas Day	Closed
Mon 26th Dec Boxing Day	Closed
Tues 27th Dec	Closed
Wed 28th Dec	4.30pm - 9.30pm
Thurs 29th Dec	Normal
Fri 30th Dec	Normal
Sat 31st Dec NewYear's Eve	11.45am-2pm
Sun 1st Jan NewYear's Day	Closed
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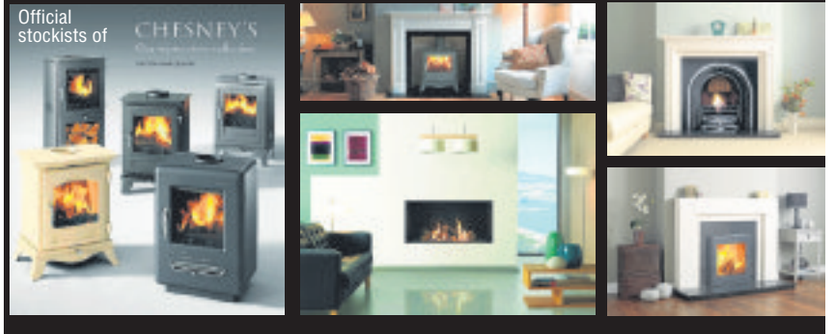

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Remember dementia at Christmas

FRESH research by Alzheimer's Society found that more than half of of people affected by dementia find Christmas to be the most isolating time of the year, with many saying they are dreading the festivities.

Lee Allen, services manager at Alzheimer's Society in the Black Country, calls for the community to consider the needs of people with the condition even more at this time of year.

He said: "While for many this time of year is full of excitement, we must not forget that dementia doesn't stop at Christmas and feelings such as isolation and confusion can be intensified during this time of year.

Quiet

"Alzheimer's Society is here to support people affected by dementia to cope in the lead up to Christmas. From not overloading the dinner plate to allocating a quiet room where people with dementia can find solace during busy times, our guidance on how to support people during the festive season will empower people to make small steps to have a better experience."

To support families affected by dementia particularly at this time of year, Alzheimer's Society has created an infographic – www.alzheimers.org.uk/supportatchristmas – which has guidance about coping with Christmas.

Chance to have a say on the fire service

WEST Midlands Fire Service is running a public consultation on how it is run and funded.

The 'Have Your Say' consultation runs until Tuesday, January 10.

For further information on the consultation contact the nearest station or to complete the survey visit https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/FZ7X-WBL

Return of the age of the train as passenger numbers rise

Raise a glass to these boys after cup win

Stourbridge celebrate in the dressing room at Amblecote after the FA Cup win over Northampton took them to the third round

GIANT-KILLERS Stourbridge were this week reflecting on one of the biggest wins in the club's history as they made it through to the third round of the FA Cup for the first time.

There were wild scenes at the War Memorial Ground last Tuesday night as the Glassboys overcame the odds to beat League One side Northampton Town.

The famous victory will net the club £27,000 as they prepare to take on Wycombe Wanderers of League Two in the next round, with the dream of facing a Premier League side still very much alive.

A win at High Wycombe on January 7 would see Stour get a further windfall of more than £70,000.

The match looked to be heading for a replay when college student Jack Duggan's 86th minute winner sparked jubilant celebrations among the crowd of more than 2,500 who witnessed the biggest cup upset of the season so far.

Fans invaded the pitch at the final whistle eager to celebrate with their heroes.

Celebrities at the ground included Led Zeppelin star Robert Plant along with Miles Hunt from The Wonder Stuff.

Boss Gary Hackett called it a 'proud night' for the non-league club and took aim at the BBC for choosing not to screen the game. Chairman Andy Poutney said the lack of recognition drove the team on. He added: "We were completely dismissed by live TV. It wasn't hard to get the lads up for it, we said 'they don't think we're going to beat Northampton'."

THE number of people catching trains across the Black Country and Staffordshire has increased by nearly seven per cent in the last year, new figures reveal.

There were 20.375 million 'entries and exits' at stations across the region in 2015/16, up from 19.081 million the year before. Of the region's 33 railway stations, just three saw their overall visitors decline during that time. According to the estimates of the usage by the Office of Rail and Road, Cannock station was visited by 221,124 people in 2014/15 but a total of 220,290 travellers over the last year.

Cannock could benefit from £76m work which will see electrification of the Chase Line, which runs from Rugeley to Walsall. That should be completed by next December.

Wolverhampton railway station, which is operated by Virgin Trains, saw 4.746m visitors in 2015/16 – an increase of 5.6 per cent from 2014/15's total of 4.495m.

Junction

Dudley's busiest station, Stourbridge Junction, saw an increase to 1.434m. It rose from 1.323m and showed an 8.3 per cent rise.

Rowley Regis, which was the busiest in Sandwell, was used by 1.015m passengers after 921,116 people used it in 2014/15. People using Walsall rose to 1.404m from 1.303m in 2014/15 – a 7.7 per cent increase.

Usage of Stafford station also rose, from 2.119m to 2.228m.

Steve Wright from independent campaign group Railfuture said: "We are very enthusiastic about rail in the West Midlands and it is generally accepted that the growth in the West Midlands is growing more quickly than anywhere else in the country.

"We are looking forward to the next franchise, which is due in July next year for October next year. That may see some significant improvements in (journey) frequency."

Rieu concert postponed due to illness

THE concert by Dutch violinist Andre Rieu and his orchestra due to be held at the Genting Arena at the NEC last night (Wednesday) has been postponed after one of his musicians suffered a heart attack.

Mr Rieu, who is one of the biggest stars of easy listening music, said: "Many of my orchestra members have been with me for more than 25 years. We are a family. We are deeply saddened by this tragic event and it is impossible for us to continue our tour as planned.

"Thank you all so much for your understanding in this difficult moment."

Customers are advised to retain their ticket for the rescheduled show as all tickets will remain valid for the new dates.

If customers are unable to attend the rescheduled date, full refunds will be available from the point of sale.

Concerts in Nottingham, London, Manchester and Glasgow have also been postponed.

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It has a large range of midi and mini skips and it offers a prompt delivery and collection service. This family-run business, which has all the necessary environmental licences, aims to continue serving the Sandwell area for many years to come. For an affordable quote, call Russell Skips today on 0121 520 3388 or 07721 387990.

Couple give first home away to asylum-seekers

A DEVOUT Christian couple have splurged their life savings on a house for asylum-seekers.

Steph and Matthew Neville, from Birmingham, splashed £114,000 on a three bedroom property to help those fleeing conflict – and will let them live there for free.

The couple sacrificed their dream of buying a house together, instead putting 10 years' worth of savings towards a deposit.

The Christians will continue to live in a religious commune while they pay off the mortgage, having shelved their hopes of buying somewhere for the two of them. But they insist it's not to 'show they're better than anyone else'.

Steph, aged 35, said: "We'd been saving up for 10 years, our whole working lives, to put towards a house.

Horrific

"But then we started to think about how we wanted to use this money and having both worked with refugees, their stories inspired us. We've heard horrific tales about their struggles and wanted to offer them sanctuary."

Steph and Matthew, who's also 35, got in touch with the Hope Project – a Midland-based charity offering 'practical support and legal advice for homeless asylum-seekers'. The couple – who've been married for 12 years – then bought the house earlier this year and have since passed it over to the charity who will use it to house asylum-seekers. Steph said: "We used our savings to pay for a deposit and have taken a mortgage out as well.

"The house will continue to belong to us, but we have passed it over to the Hope Project who will be responsible for selecting who benefits from the house." The three-bed terraced house is in Winson Green.

Steph and Matthew Neville

The house in Winson Green

Driver arrested after crash

A driver who allegedly made off after a four-car smash has been arrested.

The crash took place at around 11.30am on Monday on Blackhalve Lane, Wednesfield. It caused chaos as police from Wednesfield, Oxley and Bushbury plus the ambulance service attended.

Tweeting about the crash, Wednesfield Police said: "Attended Blackhalve Lane for a 4 car RTC with one driver making off from the scene but caught around the corner and arrested." A police statement said: "An 18 year old has been arrested after officers were called out to reports of a car colliding with three vehicles in Blackhalve Lane, Wednesfield.

"Witnesses saw the teenager. He was caught by an off-duty police community support officer on Cannock Road shortly afterwards. He was taken to hospital with injuries consistent with a crash and later arrested on suspicion of taking a car without consent and causing damage."

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Horse and carts adorn this street scene, of Lower High Street

The up-and-coming game of tennis soon caught on in Wednesbury

Cricket in Wednesbury was very much part of the town's social scene

Tony Highfield at Darlaston Library with the new book 'Ryder's Annual', highlighting the Black Country's past

Book offers a glimpse of life in 19th century

IT has taken a year to put together, but now people have the chance to glimpse into the past and get their hands on a very special piece of Black Country history.

The Very Best of Ryder's Annual book has been put together by Bev Parker and Tony Highfield. The book features some of the stories and pictures from the well-known Ryder's Annual, that was first published in the 19th century.

The book charts Wednesbury's history from 1878 to 1918 and goes some way in illustrating the people of the town's contribution to the war effort.

Tony Highfield, aged 74, of Bloxwich revealed how he first came up with the idea for the book. He said: "I was walking down Darlaston High Street when a friend of mine, Joan Bytheway, came up to me and said she had been given some old books for a jumble sale.

"She asked whether I'd like to see

MEMORY LANE

Report by Jessica Labhart

them. I said I would and when I went round there and saw them, I couldn't believe it. The books were two extremely rare Ryder's Annuals.

"I asked if I could borrow them, which I was told I could, and then I spoke to Bev about them.

"We decided to begin putting a book together on the best of the annuals, and went and visited Wednesbury Library to look at their archive of annuals, too."

The book was launched on December 3 at Wednesbury Library then at Darlaston Library on December 10. Mindful Gifts CIC, based on Church Street, Darlaston, a not-for-profit organisation, is also sponsoring the book as it specialises in gifts and activities for people with dementia.

It is hoped that the book will provide an insight into the life and times of local people's ancestors. The book also contains an almanac devoted to the First World War.

Mr Highfield said: "I just think it is so interesting to see the lives of the people in the book.

"People might be able to find their ancestors in there, old businesses, churches, groups, clubs and societies." In the introduction of the book, Bev Parker states: "The Ryder Annuals offer a unique insight into life in a successful and rapidly developing area. They feature images of the town's dignitaries, industrialists, councillors, photographs of the town centre and countless adverts describing Black Country businesses.

Mr Highfield added: "I always get people coming up to me saying they wish they'd spoken to their grandmothers and grandfathers about local history and their ancestors.

"What I'd say is, this book gives you an idea of what life was like back then, but do speak to granny, before it's too late, and share some of those memories and stories together."

The book costs £9.99.

Miners from Wednesbury on shift at a local colliery, seen in the cage which leads down the shaft

Band of Black Country lads had 17 top 20 hits during career

At the height of their fame, the foursome leaving for America

Slade later in their career in party mood

Fans meet Don at his first home on Green Park Road, Bilston

A new look after the band had left behind their skinhead days

Drummer Don Powell. Pictures: Barry Plummer

Slade at Heathrow airport, ready to fly out in 1972

Glam rock personified, with Dave Hill's glittery look

Slade come Bak 'Ome to celebrate 50 merry years

REPORT BY JORDAN HARRIS

BLACK Country glam rock and roll icons Slade returned to where it all began, to look back on 50 years of glory.

They are a band synonymous with good times whose energy-packed anthems still rattle with the same electricity as when they were first released.

Last Friday marked Slade's 50th anniversary, and to mark the milestone a show was held at The Robin 2, the live music venue in Bilston which has become the band's spiritual home over the years.

While the current Slade live experience might miss the inimitable howl of Noddy Holder on lead vocals, it has become a celebration of the band's spirit, which has always been one of its key features.

It certainly takes a lot of spirit for four young Black Country lads to visualise a life of Technicolor glam rock in front of them while rehearsing in Bilston.

But listening back to the early recordings, they prove they were hellbent on harnessing the escapist power of music in order to change their lives.

Fashion

Once the band got its foot in the door, there was no stopping them.

Noddy Holder, Don Powell, Dave Hill and Jim Lea became household names, with songs such as Take Me Bak 'Ome and Mama Weer All Crazee Now taking them to the top of the charts.

However, it wasn't just the music that caught people's attention and sold millions of records. As the band racked up an incredible 17 consecutive top 20 hits, they became notorious for song title mis-spellings, the rock and roll attitude of its stars and a unique sense of fashion.

The greatest example of this is Noddy's famous mirrored top hat, a symbol of the excess and brashness of the times which no-one else would dare attempt to pull off.

Dave Hill also indulged with fashion excesses. He favoured silver and gold outfits with massive platform boots.

The band's best-selling single, and last number one, is the festive anthem Merry Xmas Everybody, which has become so attached to this time of year it is hard to imagine going through December without hearing it.

In a way, it is a perfect representation of the band at their peak, an unashamedly joyful song that reaches out to the masses with open arms. Their peak years were such a blaze of glory that it was inevitable that a dip would come and as the world around them changed and punk arrived in the 70s, their popularity began to fade. These are the times when a band's character is truly tested, after the fame and glory, without the energy of youth on their side and drained from years of touring and partying.

It wasn't long before they were back in the hearts and minds of the public, with a performance at Reading Festival in 1980 bringing Slade to a new audience. That would be done again years later when Oasis shouted their appreciation for the band from the rooftops, even covering Cum On Feel The Noize.

Don released his autobiography Look Wot I Dun in 2013 and his childhood home at Bilston was chosen for a visit by fans at a Slade convention in 2015.

But last Friday's show was all about looking back on the good times and the bad, reliving songs that are part of the Black Country's heritage, the fashion choices that continue to raise eyebrows and the connec-

The band at the height of their powers in the early 1970s when they were always in the charts and on Top of the Pops almost every week

In 2002 Slade received University of Wolverhampton fellowships

Noddy leading from the front as always with an outrageous tie

Look wot you dun boys – nearly two million sales in the UK

In Flame, also their movie

IN the UK, the band has sold a certified 520,000 albums...

Beginnings as Ambrose Slade, 1969; **Play It Loud 1970;** Slayed? 1972; **Old New Borrowed and Blue 1974**; Slade in Flame 1974; **Nobody's Fools 1976**.

Whatever Happened to Slade 1977; **Return to Base 1979**; We'll Bring the House Down 1981; **Till Deaf Do Us Part 1981**.

The Amazing Kamikaze Syndrome 1983, re-released in 1984. **Rogues Gallery 1985**; Crackers – The Christmas Party Album 1985; **You Boyz Make Big Noize** 1987. Keep on Rockin' 1994 – as Slade II, re-released in 2002.

Slade sold a staggering 1.8 million singles...

1969, Wild Winds Are Blowing.

1970, Shape of Things to Come, Know Who You Are.

1971, Get Down and Get with It, Coz I Luv You, Look Wot You Dun.

1972, Take Me Bak 'Ome, Mama Weer All Crazee Now, Gudbuy T'Jane.

1973, Cum On Feel the Noize, Skweeze Me, Pleeze Me, My Friend Stan, Merry Xmas Everybody.

1974, Everyday, The Bangin' Man, Far Far Away.

1975, How Does It Feel, Thanks for the Memory, Wham Bam Thank You Mam, In for a Penny.

1976, Let's Call It Quits, Nobody's Fool.

1977, Gypsy Roadhog, Burning in the Heat of Love, My Baby Left Me.

1978, Give Us a Goal, Rock 'n' Roll Bolero.

1979, Ginny, Ginny, I'm a Rocker, Sign of the Times, Okey Cokey.

1981, We'll Bring the House Down, Wheels Ain't Coming Down, Knuckle Sandwich Nancy, Lock Up Your Daughters.

1982, Ruby Red, Rock and Roll Preacher, And Now the Waltz C'est La Vie.

1983, My Oh My, Cum On Feel the Noize, re-issue.

1984, Run Runaway, Slam the Hammer Down, All Join Hands.

1985, 7 Year Bitch, Myzsterious Mizster Jones, Little Sheila, Do You Believe in Miracles.

1987, Still the Same, That's What Friends Are For, You Boyz Make Big Noize, Ooh La La in LA, We Won't Give In.

1988, Let's Dance '88'.

One of Slade's biggest hits

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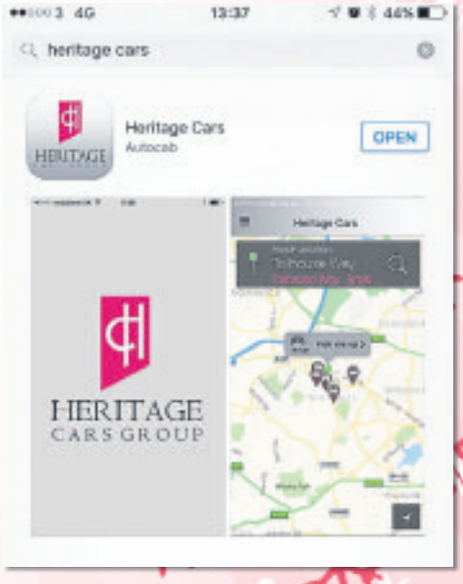

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Philip Hammond's card, featuring his dogs, Rex and Oscar

Ian Austin's Christmas card, designed by Charleigh Finch of Bramford Primary School, Dudley

One of Theresa May's three designs, this one drawn by Isabelle Milnes, aged five

Gavin Williamson's card, by Amelie Moseley of Corbett CE Primary School

MPs play their cards right for Christmas

MP Mike Wood's card, designed by Maidensbridge Primary Schools pupil Alex Maher

John Spellar's card, given an extra bit of festive pizzazz thanks to Photoshop

Emma Reynolds' card, designed by Perry Hall Primary School pupil Kit Lewis

FROM stunning images of Parliament, to schoolchildren's drawings and a pair of lovable pooches decked out in festive scarves – MPs have some novel ways of spreading the Christmas cheer.

While some politicians stick to the standard House of Commons issue cards, others run competitions among local school children which can last for months and garner hundreds of entries.

Gavin Williamson chose the latter route, despite having had a busier year than most having been appointed the Government's Chief Whip by Theresa May.

The winning design, by Amelie Moseley from Corbett CE Primary School, Bobbington, features a London bus, a snowman and the ubiquitous Elizabeth Tower, which houses Big Ben.

It will be sent out to around 700 people, although Mr Williamson is taking extra care not to forget his own parents as he did last year.

"I sent all the cards out but completely forgot to send my mum and dad one," he said.

"This year I'm determined to make sure everyone gets one, although I've already signed so many of them I feel like my right hand's about to fall off."

Adorned

Labour's **Emma Reynolds** launched a competition for pupils at eight schools. Of the hundreds of entries the Wolverhampton North East MP picked a design by Kit Lewis, 10, who attends Perry Hall Primary School.

The card, which features a drawing of a Christmas tree adorned with a star, has been sent out to more than 600 people.

Ms Reynolds said: "I think the image is very striking. This was the biggest competition I have ever run and the standard of entries was the best yet."

Dudley North MP **Ian Austin** sends out hundreds of Christmas cards, with the Queen and the Prime Minister among the recipients.

After a contest among local school children that garnered hundreds of entries, Charleigh Finch of Bramford Primary School produced the winning design that adorns the front of his card.

The winning entry shows a Christmas scene with Santa flying over with Dudley Castle.

Mr Austin presented Charleigh with her chosen prize at a school assembly. He said: "It was a huge privilege to go to Bramford Primary and present her with an award for her design skills."

Runners up could choose from early Christmas gifts including a family ticket to Dudley Zoo and Castle, a family ticket to the Black Country Museum and gift vouchers for Hobbycraft.

Halesowen and Rowley Regis MP **James Morris**, who has been busy hitting the streets with the local Rotary club's charity sleigh, ran a contest among local school children for the sixth consecutive year and had 600 entries to sift through.

The winning card was designed by Year 6 pupil Ruby Field, from Our Lady & St Kenelm Primary School, Halesowen, and features a family gathering around a Christmas tree. Mr Morris said: "This is the fifth year that I have asked local primary schools to design my Christmas card and I am always impressed with the quality and variety of entries.

"Well done to Ruby and to the runners-up, as well as to everybody who sent in such fantastic entries, and a big thank you to all of the teachers and staff who encouraged their classes to take part."

Dudley South's Tory MP **Mike Wood** opened up his competition to pupils at all primary and special school pupils in his constituency.

And in a novel twist, he put the best seven entries up online for members of the public to vote on.The winner was Alex Maher, a Year 5 pupil at Maidensbridge Primary School, Wall Heath, who impressed the MP with his drawing of a Robin in a Santa hat. Warley MP **John Spellar** got creative with his card this year. He used a picture of Elizabeth Tower, with a Christmas tree in the foreground, and enhanced it using Photoshop.

Aldridge-Brownhills MP **Wendy Morton** went with a local theme for her card. It features a photograph of a wintery Pelsall Common with a gaggle of geese wandering by through the snow.

The shot was taken by Steve Swain of Walsall Wood Camera Club, while Walsall North MP **David Winnick** has sent out one of the Commons' official selection cards chosen by the Commons Speaker John Bercow.

His colleague in Walsall South, **Valerie Vaz**, also picked a card with a parliamentary theme.

The shadow leader of the House of Commons' card features a photograph of a beautifully decorated tree in Old Palace Yard with Elizabeth Tower in the background.

"It's such an iconic image," she said. "A lot of staff gave up a Sunday for free to put all the lights on the tree, which I think was a wonderful gesture."

Wolverhampton South East MP **Pat McFadden** sent the same card. He said: "It is a wonderful time of year, but it can get quite exhausting when you have about 700 cards to send."

Wolverhampton MP **Rob Marris** chose a striking image of the Houses of Parliament for his card.

Meanwhile Labour may have accused Philip Hammond of barking up the wrong tree with his Autumn Statement, but the Chancellor has shown he can bite back with an adorable card featuring his two mutts, Rex and Oscar.

Aldridge-Brownhills MP Wendy Morton's card features a photograph of a wintery Pelsall Common with a gaggle of geese in the snow, taken by Steve Swain of Walsall Wood Camera Club

Another traditional Christmas card sent out by Pat McFadden and Valerie Vaz

MP James Morris, with pupil Ruby Field and her winning design

Wolverhampton MP Rob Marris's traditional Christmas card

Pupils from Uplands Manor Primary School join a litterpick

Mayor Julie Webb at Asda, Windmills Shopping Centre, with council representatives

Youngsters at Abbey Junior School learning about fire safety, as part of the initiative

Students from Lordswood Boys School on a litterpick in and around the Bearwood area

Youngsters join in clear-ups for the final week of Safer 6

THE results are in for the Safer 6 campaign's sixth and final week, which had a special focus on Smethwick.

Community clean-ups, safety sessions in schools and door-to-door visits to help tackle crime, anti-social behaviour and rogue traders were among the week's key activities. Mayor Councillor Julie Webb was among the dignitaries at the scheme's launch.

The council, fire service and police, together with councillors, health and probation services and community and voluntary groups, all support the campaign.

Alongside the mayor were Smethwick town lead member Councillor Ann Jaron together with councillors Farut Shaeen, Preet Gill and Richard Marshall officially launched the week's activities at an information roadshow at Asda, Windmills Shopping Centre.

Lots of services were there, including the fire service, police, the council's Youth Bus and the cannabis information trailer.

Trading standards officers brought along a sniffer dog to raise awareness of illegal and counterfeit alcohol and cigarettes.

Volunteers from Sandwell Crime Prevention Panel gave out 85 home security packs, 18 cycle marking kits, 44 mobile phone security packs and 160 'no callers' door cards.

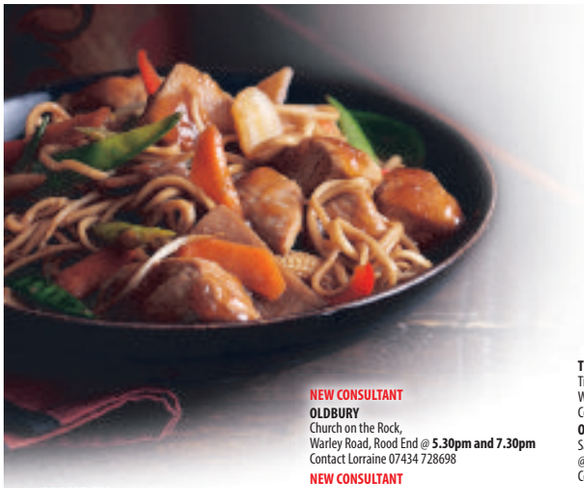
Key activities during Week Six included: Fire crews carried out 72 'Safe & Well' home visits, offering education, reassurance and advice to residents.

They also joined council officers to check smoke alarms and give safety advice in Thompson Gardens.

Fire crews took their fire engine to local schools including Shireland Hall Primary, Abbey Junior, St Gregory's Catholic Primary, Shireland Collegiate Academy and Lordswood Boys and promoted bonfire, firework, fire and road safety to pupils.

Council property intervention officers visited 81 empty private homes in Smethwick, to check they were secure and continue looking at ways to get them back into use. Offenders doing unpaid Community Payback worked with the council's estates team to clear nearly eight tons of rubbish in the Windmill Lane area.

Council neighbourhood officers, Tipton Litter Watch and Serco held a litter pick on the New Hope estate, collecting 20 bags of litter, and in Melrose Place and Frobisher Way, collecting eight bags. Pupils from Lordswood Boys School collected six bags of litter in and around Adkins Lane, while junior PCSOs from Uplands Manor Primary School joined Tipton Litter Watch to collect eight bags of litter near to Thimblemill Library.



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NEW GROUP OPENING 2ND JANUARY
SMETHWICK
Brasshouse Community Centre
Brasshouse Lane @ **7.30pm**
Contact Mel 07935 447265

TIPTON
Allens Sports and Social Club
Newall Street, @ 9.**00am, 11.00am, 1.00pm,3.30pm, 5.30pm and 7.30pm**
Contact Lorretta 07968 656634

GREAT BRIDGE
St Peter's Church Hall,
Whitehall Road, @ **5.30pm and 7:30pm**
Contact Jodie 07886 426429

WEDNESBURY
Central Methodist Church (Wesley Centre)
Spring Head @ **7.30pm**
Contact Michelle 07857 280882

NEW CONSULTANT
OLDBURY
St James C of E Church,
Shelsley Avenue, @ **7.00pm**
Contact Claire 07539 950447

NEW CONSULTANT
OLDBURY
Church on the Rock,
Warley Road, Rood End @ **5.30pm and 7.30pm**
Contact Lorraine 07434 728698

NEW CONSULTANT
ROWLEY REGIS
Dudley Golf Club
Turners Hill, B65 9DP @ **7.00pm**
Contact Sarah 07875 445462

TUESDAY
OLDBURY
Warley Baptist Church,
Castle Road East, @ **9.30 am, 5.30pm and 7.30pm**
Contact Julie 07505 084916

OLDBURY
Church on the Rock,
Warley Road, Rood End @ **9.15am and 11.15am**
Contact Lorraine 07434 728698

WEST BROMWICH
West Bromwich Community Centre,
Gayton Road,@ **5.30pm and 7.30pm**
Contact Jodie 07886 426429

WEST BROMWICH
West Bromwich Leisure Centre,
Moor Street, @ **9.30am, 3.30pm, 5.30pm and 7.30pm**
Contact Pippa 07816 900149

WEDNESBURY
Woods Methodist Church
Coronation Road, Woods Estate,
@ **5.30pm and 7.30pm**
Contact Karen 07547 515345

TIPTON
Tipton Christian Church
Waterloo Street, **5.00pm and 7.00pm**
Contact Lisa 07514 607650

OLDBURY
Sainsbury's, Freeth Street,
@ **5.30pm & 7.30pm**
Contact Ann 07815 643963

DARLASTON
Darlaston Sports & Social Club Ltd,
16 The Leys, @ **9.30am, 11.30am, 3.30pm, 5.30pm and 7.30pm**
Contact Lesley 01922 634883

BRADLEY
St Martin's Church
SlaterStreet, @ **9.30am, 11.30am, 5.00pm and 7.00pm**
Contact Jodie 07547 771319

ROWLEY REGIS
Rowley Regis Disability Centre
26 Rowley Village, B65 9AT **5.30pm and 7.30pm**
Contact Kenton 07982 408088

WEDNESDAY
WEST BROMWICH
West Bromwich Community Centre,
Gayton Road, @ **9.30am**
Contact Jodie 07886 426429

DARLASTON
Darlaston Sports & Social Club Ltd,
16 The Leys, @ **9.30am**
Contact Lesley 01922 634883

SMETHWICK
Dorothy Parkes Centre,
Church Road, **9.30am 5.30pm and 7.30pm**
Contact Mel 07935 447265

WEDNESBURY
Woods Methodist Church
Coronation Road, Woods Estate, @ **9.30am**
Contact Karen 07547 515345

WEDNESBURY
St Barts Church Hall
Bttm Church Hill @ **5.30pm and 7.30pm**
Contact Jenny 0121 556 5909

WEDNESBURY
St Luke's Church, Elwell Street,
Mesty Croft, **7.00pm**
Contact Jodie 07751 839830

BLACKHEATH
Blackheath Central Meth Church,
High Street, @ **9.30am, 11.30pm, 5.00pm and 7.00pm**
Contact Ann 07815 643963

OLDBURY
The Salvation Army Community Church,
Merton Close (off Pound Road) @ **7.30pm**
Contact Lorraine 07434 728698

TIVIDALE
St Michael's Church
Tividale Road, B69 2LQ @ **5.00pm and 7.00pm**
Contact Kenton 07982 408088

THURSDAY
OLDBURY
PortwayLifestle Centre,
Newbury Lane @ **7.00pm**
Contact Claire 07539 950447

WEDNESBURY
Lea Brook Church Hall
Leabrood Road North @ **7.30pm**
Contact Lin 07902 079559

TIVIDALE
Ormaston Sandwell Community Academy
Lower City Road @ **7.00pm**
Contact Sarah 07875 445462

NEW 1.30PM SESSION STARTS 5TH JANUARY
WEST BROMWICH
Stone Cross Library
Beverley Road @ **9.30am, 11.30am and 1.30pm**
Contact Lisa 07514 607650

WEDNESBURY
St Bart's Church Hall,
Bttm Church Hill @ **9.30am**
Contact Jenny 07751 259593

TIPTON
The Sportsman Pub (Separate entrance),
St. Marks Road, @ **9.00am, 11.00am, 5.30pm and 7.30pm**
Contact (Miss) Vinny 07412 074954

SMETHWICK
St Marks Church
Thimblemill Road @ **3.30pm, 5.30pm and 7.30pm**
Contact Michelle 07516 255665

BRANDHALL
Kings Community Church,
Oak Tree Centre, Tame Road @ **5.30pm and 7.30pm**
Contact Dawn 07859 010175

WEST BROMWICH
Stone Cross Library,
Beverley Road, @ **5.30pm and 7.30pm**
Contact Carole 07854 413929

FRIDAY
SMETHWICK
St Marks Church
Thimblemill Road @ **9.30am**
Contact Michelle 07516 255665

ROWLEY REGIS
Rowley Regis Disability Centre
26 Rowley Village, B65 9 @ **9.30am**
Contact Kenton 07982 408088

SATURDAY
NEW GROUP OPENS 7TH JANUARY
WEDNESBURY
Lea Brook Church Hall,
Leabrook Road North @ **8.00am**
Contact Lin 07902 079559

OLDBURY
Peters Well Community Centre
(Lightwoods Primary School)
Clent Road, B68 9ER @ **8.00am and 10.00am**
Contact Kerrie07923 129816

DARLASTON
Darlaston Sports & Social Club Ltd,
16 The Leys, @ **9.00am**
Contact Lesley 01922 634883

OLDBURY
Portway Lifestyle Centre,
Newbury Lane, B69 1HE @ **9.00am and 11.00am**
Contact Kenton 07982 408088

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C318 Men's

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C318: 2 Black, 2 Navy, 2 Oatmeal, 2 Brown, 2 Red and 2 mid-grey

HJ Hall

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PDSA in 'keep the lights on' campaign

CHARITY vets in Birmingham and the Black Country have launched a fundraising appeal to 'keep the lights on' for sick and injured pets this Christmas.

This month alone, PDSA's Pet Hospitals in Oldbury and Aston expect to care for around 2,440 pets – some needing emergency treatment.

But the cost of providing this vital lifeline to some of the region's most vulnerable pets is about £4,800 a day. So the charity's vet team have launched a fundraising appeal, calling on local animal lovers to help.

Julie Everill, head nurse in Aston, said: "We can only be there for these much-loved pets because of the generous support of animal lovers who help fund our service, so we're asking the local community to help us 'keep the lights on' and be there for local pets this Christmas."

Donations to the appeal can be made online at www.pdsa.org.uk/lightsonbirmingham or by texting BRUM11 with your donation amount to 70070.

MoD thefts revealed

A REPLICA sniper rifle, summer house and a 'full steel industrial kitchen' are among hundreds of items reported stolen from Ministry of Defence sites over the past two years.

The list also includes three chainsaws, two Land Rovers and a minibus, as well as 68 armour plates for a tank and a sword, according to figures released by Defence Minister Mark Lancaster.

Other military equipment to have been taken includes night vision headsets and goggles.

Man was followed home from club and attacked for cash

A WOMAN assaulted a 60-year-old man in his own home after following him from a club and demanding he hand over cash.

Kelly Abbey, aged 35, approached Roy Williams as he left the Newton Club, in Darlaston Road, Darlaston.

She demanded money before reaching into his trouser pocket in a bid to snatch his wallet.

Mr Williams managed to escape and ran to his home where Abbey and another woman barged their way inside. Abbey then took cash from his wallet before fleeing.

Following her arrest Abbey told police Mr Williams had assaulted her, that he had been drunk and she had helped him home.

But on the day of her trial at Wolverhampton Crown Court, Abbey pleaded guilty to charges of assault occasioning actual bodily harm and theft.

The court heard she was in breach of a suspended sentence for another violent assault when she attacked Mr Williams on June 26. She was jailed for 13 months for the three offences.

Mr Julian Taylor, prosecuting, told the court Mr Williams had left the Newton Club at 7pm having drunk five or six pints. He said: "Abbey went up to him and said 'I want some money off you' and he said he had none. She grabbed him around the neck and tried to get into his trouser pocket.

"Abbey said 'I am having everything in your wallet'. Mr Williams said 'I'll give you a tenner, now f*** off'."

Mr Williams broke free from the confrontation and ran off – but Abbey, of Phoenix Drive, Wednesbury, chased him and pushed him in the back and he fell to the ground.

He eventually made it to his flat where the two women followed him inside.

Mr Taylor added: "The defendant took £130 from his wallet and threw £20 behind the sofa. She put the rest in the bin.

"She then grabbed his glasses and threw them to the floor, leaving him disorientated."

Mr Tariq Shakoor, defending, said her past offending had centred on shoplifting and not violent incidents.

He added she had problems with drink which had contributed to the violent offences.

Judge Amjad Nawaz said: "You had no right to be in his house. Mercifully he had no serious injuries."

Help for families who are faced with losing home

WHILE many of us get ready to spend Christmas with our loved ones, some families could be at risk of losing their home.

Homeless charity Shelter has provided advice for people who don't know where to turn.

Vicky Hines, manager of the organisation's Birmingham hub, which provides free, expert housing advice to people living across the West Midlands, said: "For most, the approach of Christmas is welcomed as a warm time to forget about your worries and relax with family and friends.

"But for a growing number who are facing homelessness, Christmas is just the height of winter when the cold and dark make the threat of losing their home all the greater."

Ms Hines said the charity's report on December 1 showed the scale of the problem, revealing there were more than 16,000 homeless and in temporary accommodation across the West Midlands today, with Walsall, Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull earmarked as particular hotspots.

"This report also marks our 50th year, so it's with mixed emotions that we can look back on half a century of progress, but look ahead to ending homelessness once and for all," she said.

"In winter the problem most people come to us with is where to apply for assistance and temporary accommodation.

"For many families, they might be in temporary accommodation such as hostels or B&Bs in cramped conditions, living alongside strangers. We can offer you further advice through our drop-in service."

Ballet treat for young patients

Principal dancer Jenna Roberts, soloist Kit Holder, hospital volunteer Judith Wiggins, ward manager John Daley, principal dancer Iain Mackay and first artist Jade Heusen

YOUNG patients enjoyed the magic of The Nutcracker at Birmingham Children's Hospital.

Performers from Birmingham Royal Ballet took time out from their busy schedule to visit the cancer ward, putting some seasonal smiles on the faces of patients.

The dancers spoke with children, families and staff, posed for photographs in their glittering costumes and gave out signed stickers and photos as festive gifts.

Drew Barker-Wright, who is undergoing treatment for Chordoma – a rare type of cancer which forms on the spine – was one of many children thrilled to meet the cast. The three-year-old, from Talgarth in Wales, has previously done baby ballet, but his condition means he now finds it difficult to even sit up in bed.

Despite this, he took to the floor to show off some ballet positions, much to the delight of mother Melanie, who is also trained dancer.

John Daly, manager of Ward 15 at Birmingham Children's Hospital, said: "It was fantastic to be able to welcome the Birmingham Royal Ballet dancers, who certainly brought some festive sparkle with them."

Trains in West Midlands could be driver-only in new franchise

TRAIN drivers in the West Midlands could be made responsible for opening and closing carriage doors under the new franchise contract being signed next year.

Two rail companies are bidding for the multi-million pound contract. In documents sent out to firms, the Department of Transport (DfT) says passenger benefits 'can include the implementation of Driver Controlled Operation (DCO)'.

Under the DCOsystem, the train driver is responsible for all safety aspects of the train, making the 'train guard' redundant. It involves a door button positioned in the driver's cab.

The move has already proved controversial elsewhere in the country. Southern Railway is considering bringing in the system. Staff have protested, going on strike and causing disruption.

Ken Usher, Midlands regional organiser for the RMT union, said: "Prospects of any introduction of DCO fills us with grief. We will completely oppose any such changes in West Midlands and the rest of the country.

"If DfT claims it's in the interest of passengers, then they ought to consider 82 per cent of the same passengers who wish to see a nationalised railway system. This is a matter of private profit and private greed.''

A DfT spokesman said: "We are committed to improving rail services across the West Midlands, this is why the next franchise will provide a host of improvements."

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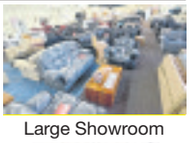

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Ian Adams' superb Widow Twankey wore a succession of outrageous costumes that seemed to defy gravity

Most of the laughs come courtesy of Adam C Booth as Aladdin's brother, the accident-prone Wishee Washee

Am yam ready? Panto fun wish has come true

WHAT a Grand panto... oh yes it is! If you're looking for a festive feast of fun with magical music and tremendous tricks, then the Grand's genie of the lamp will make your wish come true.

It is without doubt the Lichfield Street theatre's best seasonal show for years with a perfect balance of TV talent and seasoned stage performers.

And a star is born... she yam what she yam-yam but 'lazy' Doreen Tipton comes close to stealing the show as the Empress of China. Apparently she had to apply for the Empress job to keep her benefits and was rather dismayed to get the gig.

Sometimes it means she has to get up before 2pm or miss the Jeremy Kyle show.

With a Black Country accent so thick it could plug the cut, she was an instant hit with panto-goers.

And I suspect Gill Jordan's comic creation will be in demand in panto land (at least in the West Midlands) for years to come.

Joe McElderry is a suitably handsome and dashing Aladdin, and those who saw him on The X Factor, Popstar To Operastar or on stage in Joseph know he has an excellent singing voice.

Further fine vocals come from Britain's Got Talent finalist Lucy Kay as Princess Jasmine and Neal Wright as an American-accented Genie of the Lamp.

Most of the laughs come courtesy of Adam C Booth as Aladdin's brother, the accident-prone Wishee Washee, and Ian Adams' superb Widow Twankey.

The scene where the pair get shrunk in the wash was priceless. As Aladdin's washer woman mom, Adams wore a succession of outrageous costumes that seemed to defy gravity.

And all three of the Twankeys did defy gravity on a stunning magic carpet scene in which Aladdin loops the loop over the heads of a marvelling audience.

Stefan Pejic's Abanazar is an eminently hissable villain in the booming Tom Baker mode, gold-clad Lisa Riley makes for a wisecracking ballroom-dancing Slave of the Ring and CBeebies favourite Ben Faulks is the slapstick PC Ping Pong.

Add a troupe of energetic dancers and a soundtrack full of pop and showtune favourites, and you've got one Christmas cracker of a show.

It's on at the Grand until January 22.

LEON BURAKOWSKI

A star is born... she yam what she yam-yam but 'lazy' Doreen Tipton comes close to stealing the show as the Empress of China

Neal Wright as an American-accented Genie of the Lamp

Snowbody could better this duet

THE Snowman returns to Birmingham Repertory Theatre in the New Year to delight young and old alike from January 11 to 15, with its wonderful mix of storytelling, spectacle, music and magic.

For the first time this year the show will feature a new recording of the iconic song Walking in the Air in which the adult Aled Jones duets with his younger self, in a new arrangement by composer Howard Blake.

The new arrangement features on Aled's latest album One Voice at Christmas, which recently reached number one in the Classic FM charts, and will now also feature in The Snowman on stage.

Aled Jones said: "Walking in the Air caps off such a great year for me and I'm thrilled to give it a new lease of life. Who knows, maybe we'll get to the top of the Christmas chart again!"

Howard Blake said: "This is a unique theatrical event whereby through the wonders of technology one can hear Aled at the age of 12 singing with Aled as the tenor he is now. I am delighted that we can include it in the show."

Based on the book by Raymond Briggs and the film directed by Dianne Jackson, the stage show has transported generations of children and their families into the wintery world of a boy and his magical snowman.

The Birmingham Rep production features music and lyrics by Howard Blake performed by a live orchestra, choreography by Robert North, direction by Bill Alexander, design by Ruari Murchison and lighting by Tim Mitchell.

The enchanting show tells the story of a young boy's adventures when his snowman comes miraculously to life on Christmas Eve. Featuring a dazzling array of colourful characters including dancing penguins, magical reindeer, a beautiful snow princess, her wicked beau Jack Frost and of course, Father Christmas himself.

The Snowman is a Christmas treat for all the family and a perfect introduction to theatre for the very young.

The Snowman at Birmingham Rep is a traditional wintertime family treat

Fuller sound for Fall Girl

A SINGER-SONGWRITER has released her first self-produced album. Michelle Sciarrotta, who performs under the name Fall Girl, released debut album Arcana on digital platforms including iTunes, Spotify and Amazon this month.

She says the 11-track album, which was recorded, written and produced in her home studio, gave her a chance to experiment with different styles.

It acts as an expansion to her stripped back live sets, with songs she performs in front of audiences using just her voice and acoustic guitar fleshed out with keyboards, drums and more.

Michelle, originally from Coventry, said: "This has been the first major project I have put together on my own, which is something I have quite enjoyed. It is daunting, because there are times when you miss working with other people. But what you get is the clearest representation of the sound you want in your head, it is less of a committee thing."

Record

Michelle is a classically-trained musician who makes her living from performing, not only as Fall Girl but under her own name with a covers set, as well as working with other musicians including former Wolfsbane rocker Blaze Bayley.

A launch event for physical copies of Arcana was held at record shop Vinyl & Vintage, on Cleveland Street in Wolverhampton. Michelle will play her final show of the year as Fall Girl on December 27 at The Jam House in Birmingham. For more information on Fall Girl, visit www.facebook.com/fallgirlmusic or see fallgirl.net

Make arena dates with rock legends

CLASSIC rock fans can add major gigs in Birmingham to their 2017 diaries. School's Out rocker Alice Cooper will be at the Barclaycard Arena on November 14 with The Mission and The Tubes. Before that, his shock rock rivals Kiss, fronted by Gene Simmons, play the Barclaycard Arena on May 8.

Ritchie Blackmore's Rainbow are at the NEC Genting Arena on June 28 and his former colleagues bring Deep Purple to the Barclaycard Arena on November 17. The Who perform Tommy and more at the Barclaycard Arena April 12 and Black Sabbath say farewell at the Genting Arena on February 2 and 4.

Osmonds join Brum festivities

JIMMY Osmond brings his brothers Merrill and Jay to Birmingham Town Hall on Friday in tribute to the late crooner Andy Williams, who launched The Osmonds with his Christmas Extravaganza TV shows.

The festive variety show will also feature Britain's Got Talent ventriloquist Steve Hewlett and singer Charlie Green.

Also on Friday night, singers Laura Tebbutt and Tim Howar join Capital Voices and London Concert Orchestra for White Christmas at the Symphony Hall. The same venue hosts Christmas By Candlelight with the Mozart Festival Orchestra on Christmas Eve afternoon.

Musical nostalgia with tribute bands

GET the festivities going with the sounds of three decades ago with tribute act Kick Up The 80s at Bilston's Robin 2 venue on Friday. Or join The Upbeat Beatles for a Christmas Eve tribute to the Fab Four at the Robin on Saturday.

Also coming up at the Mount Pleasant venue are Thin Lizzy tribute Limehouse Lizzy on Boxing Day night, ska legends Bad Manners on Tuesday and The Dirty DC tribute to Aussie rockers AC/DC on Wednesday.

Turn the clock back to Madchester in the 90s for a triple tribute featuring Definitely Maybe, Adored and Happy Mondaze on Thursday (Dec 29).

CHOICE

Shirley Bassey

David Walliams Celebrates Dame Shirley Bassey (BBC1, 9pm)

They say that parody is the highest form of flattery. If that's the case, Shirley Bassey should be thrilled to bits by the way in which David Walliams and Matt Lucas paid homage to her during their late-1990s show Rock Profiles – Lucas played the great Dame as a diva claiming to have had more hits that she actually has. Not that the girl from Tiger Bay is exactly short of career-defining songs, having performed three 007 title numbers as well as plenty of other show-stopping tunes (her rendition of Big Spender remains definitive, for instance). She turns 80 in January, and to celebrate that landmark, she shares the stage with Walliams, one of her biggest fans.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **10.00** Saturday Kitchen. **11.30 Film:** A Christmas Carol. (2009) **1.00** BBC News; Weather. **1.15** Winter: Earth's Seasonal Secrets. **2.15 Film:** The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian. (2008) **4.30** Shrek the Halls. (R) **4.50 Film:** Penguins of Madagascar. (2014)

6.15 BBC News.

6.25 Regional Programme.

6.30 Pointless Celebrities. Alexander Armstrong and Richard Osman present a Christmas special of the general knowledge quiz, with Lesley Joseph, Duncan James, Faye Tozer, Bobby Davro and Joe Pasquale.

7.25 Michael McIntyre's Big Christmas Show. Michael puts a festive spin on his weekend variety entertainment show, with live performances by Alfie Boe, Michael Ball, Catherine Tate and Harry Enfield.

8.25 EastEnders. Phil is given some tough love by both Shirley and Denise, Linda receives devastating family news and Dot closes up for the final time. Donna is touched by a dinner invitation.

9.00 David Walliams Celebrates Dame Shirley Bassey. The comedy actor hosts this special evening of entertainment in which the veteran singer performs some of her best-loved songs and looks back on her 60 years in showbusiness.

10.05 Peter Kay's Christmas Comedy Shuffle. A festive collection of clips from the comedian's TV career, featuring highlights from Car Share and Phoenix Nights, as well as a seasonal singalong with Paul McCartney.

10.50 The Vicar of Dibley. Alice suggests an unconventional nativity play starring herself and Hugo as Mary and Joseph, and adds an extra touch of authenticity by going into labour mid-performance. (R)

11.30 BBC News; Weather.; National Lottery Update.

11.45 Midnight Mass: from St Chad's Birmingham. The Most Rev Bernard Longley, Archbishop of Birmingham, leads a Christmas Eve Midnight Mass broadcast live from St Chad's Cathedral.

1.00 Film: Surviving Christmas. (2004) **2.25** Weather for the Week Ahead. **2.30** BBC News.

BBC2

6.15 Film: Mars Needs Moms. (2011) Animated sci-fi adventure, with the voice of Seth Robert Dusky. **7.40** The NFL Show. (R) **8.10 Film:** Hans Christian Andersen. (1952) Musical, starring Danny Kaye. **10.00** Robot Wars. (R) **11.00** Wallace & Gromit: A Close Shave. (R) **11.30** Nigella's Christmas Kitchen. (R) **12.00** The Cook Who Changed Our Lives. (R) **1.00 Film:** Splash! (1984) Romantic fantasy comedy, with Tom Hanks and Daryl Hannah. **2.45** Snow Chick: A Penguin's Tale. (R) **3.45** Gorilla Family and Me. (R) **4.45** Gorilla Family and Me. (R) **5.45** Carols from King's.

7.00 Dad's Army. The platoon challenges a rival regiment to a gruelling duel, involving map-reading, initiative tests, river-crossing and field-fighting, to prove they are fitter and better trained than any other troop. Vintage comedy with the bumbling Home Guard of Walmington-on-Sea, starring Arthur Lowe, John Le Mesurier and Ian Lavender. (R)

8.00 Alan Bennett's Diaries. A candid profile of the writer, following him in his home village in Yorkshire, to his community library in Primrose Hill and during a trip to New York. In a series of intimate encounters filmed over the period of a year, he reflects on his modest beginnings and his enduring gratitude to a Welfare State that paid for his education and looked after his parents in their old age.

9.00 Film: The Lady in the Van. (2015) Premiere. The true story of writer Alan Bennett's friendship with an eccentric homeless woman, whom he befriended in the 1970s before allowing her to park her dilapidated Bedford van outside his Camden home, where she ended up staying for 15 years. Comedy-drama, starring Maggie Smith, Alex Jennings, Roger Allam and Jim Broadbent.

10.40 The National Lottery Live. The all-important winning numbers are revealed.

10.50 Christmas TOTP2 Special. Mark Radcliffe presents festive performances from the Top of the Pops archive, including classics by Slade, Wham!, Wizzard, East 17, Mud, the Jackson 5 and Johnny Mathis. (R)

12.20 Film: Viva Las Vegas. (1964) **1.40** Sign Zone: Countryfile. (R) **2.40** Holby City. (R) **3.40** This Is BBC Two. Preview of upcoming programmes.

ITV

6.00 CITV: Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids. **6.20** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.35** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.45** Super 4. (R) **6.55** Signed Stories. (R) **7.05** Sooty. (R) **7.10** Oddbods. (R) **7.15** Oddbods. (R) **7.25** Nerds & Monsters. (R) **7.40** Nerds & Monsters. (R) **7.55** Horrid Henry. (R) **8.10** Horrid Henry. (R) **8.25** Weekend at Christmas. **9.25** Thunderbirds Are Go. **9.50** The Chase. (R) **10.50** You've Been Framed! With Bells On. (R) **11.20 Film:** Despicable Me. (2010) **1.20** ITV News; Weather. **1.30 Film:** Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone. (2001) Fantasy adventure, starring Daniel Radcliffe. **4.20 Film:** One Hundred and One Dalmatians. (1961) Disney animated adventure, with the voice of Betty Lou Gerson.

6.00 Regional Programme; Weather.

6.15 ITV News; Weather.

6.30 Blankety Blank. David Walliams presents a one-off special revival of the 1970s game show in which contestants and a panel of celebrities must identify the missing word in a phrase.

7.30 Coronation Street. Aidan admits to Johnny he is in love with Maria while she heads to court, and Nick feels left out as Peter and Leanne reflect on old times.

8.00 Birds of a Feather. Sharon, Tracey and Dorien head to Morocco to track down Travis when he goes missing while on his gap year. Comedy, starring Pauline Quirke, Linda Robson and Lesley Joseph.

9.00 Grantchester Christmas Special. It's the week before Christmas, and Sidney and Geordie are drawn into a case with echoes of an unsolved murder from nine years previously when a bride-to-be reports the disappearance of her groom on their wedding day. Drama set in the 1950s, starring James Norton, Robson Green, Morven Christie and Al Weaver.

10.30 Through the Keyhole. Keith Lemon hosts a Christmas special of the game show, as celebrity panellists Shayne Ward, Kelly Brook and Johnny Vegas are asked to identify the homes of the rich and famous.

11.30 ITV News; Weather.

11.45 Christmas Carols on ITV. Aled Jones joins the congregation of St Chad's church in Rochdale.

12.40 All Star Mr & Mrs Christmas Special. (R) **1.30 Film:** Carry On Loving. (1970) **3.05** ITV Nightscreen.

CHANNEL 4

6.15 Olive, the Other Reindeer. (R) **7.05 Film:** A Turtle's Tale: Sammy's Adventures. (2010) **8.40** Father Christmas. (R) **9.10** Painting the Bear Hunt. **9.15** Christmas Brunch. **12.15** Jamie's Ultimate Christmas. (R) **1.15** The Simpsons. (R) **1.45** The Simpsons. (R) **2.15** The Simpsons. (R) **2.45 Film:** Scrooged. (1988) Christmas comedy, starring Bill Murray. **4.40** Channel 4 News. **4.45** The Snowman. (R) **5.15** The Snowman and the Snowdog. (R) **5.50 Film:** The Muppet Christmas Carol. (1992) Puppet comedy, starring Michael Caine.

7.30 We're Going on a Bear Hunt. Animated adventure, based on Michael Rosen's popular children's story of the same name, featuring the voices of Olivia Colman, Pam Ferris and Mark Williams.

8.00 Gogglesprogs Christmas Special. Young TV viewers appraise the year's television programmes in this festive edition, from big news stories about the American Presidential election to TV's most popular hits, including Strictly Come Dancing, First Dates and Planet Earth II.

9.00 8 Out of 10 Cats Does Countdown Christmas Special. Jimmy Carr hosts a festive edition of the comedy panel show, with guests Kathy Burke and Russell Howard joining Sean Lock and Jon Richardson. With Joe Lycett and Joe Wilkinson.

10.00 Rude Tube Christmas Cracker 2016. Alex Zane and his canine companion Bah Hum-Pug present some of the most popular seasonal internet videos, including a rocket-powered reindeer and a Christmas message from Bjork.

11.00 Trigger Happy Christmas Special. Dom Joly returns with a festive edition of the hidden-camera show, featuring new characters alongside the "big mobile man", who now has a smartphone with apps and video-calling.

11.30 The Inbetweeners. The gang goes on the infamous sociology and geography field trip to Swanage, and Will takes a shine to new girl Lauren – but she is only interested in Simon. (R)

12.05 The Inbetweeners. (R) **1.30** Friday Night Dinner. (R) **2.25** The Last Leg Christmas Special. (R) **3.20** My Crazy Christmas Lights. (R) **4.10** Location, Location, Location. (R) **5.05** The Restoration Man. (R) **5.55** Prep & Landing. (R)

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake! **8.30** SpongeBob SquarePants. **9.05 Film:** Doctor Zhivago. (1965) **12.50 Film:** The Vikings. (1958) Historical adventure, starring Kirk Douglas and Tony Curtis. **3.05 Film:** Jason and the Argonauts. (1963) Fantasy adventure, starring Todd Armstrong. **5.10 Film:** Scrooge – A Christmas Carol. (1951) Charles Dickens' fantasy, starring Alastair Sim.

6.55 Andre Rieu: Christmas in London. A festive concert given by the Dutch violinist and the Johann Strauss Orchestra in 2015, featuring Christmas carols, popular classical pieces and songs including Leonard Cohen's Hallelujah and the Concierto de Aranjuez.

8.00 The Yorkshire Vet at Christmas. The veterinary documentary series concludes with a festive trip to Skeldale. Elderly farmer Jean, one of the show's most colourful characters, makes a Christmas cake with ingredients that have been "maturing" for seven years, and vet Peter Wright fears the worst when he is called to tend to a cow that has collapsed. Back at the surgery, Julian Norton has to make a difficult decision regarding Barney, a spaniel with a huge, fast-growing tumour on his leg. The residents of Thirsk plan to mark James Herriot's centenary by inviting his successors to turn on the town's Christmas lights, but Julian and Peter face a more daunting challenge when they are asked to help find a donkey for the town square nativity scene. Last in the series.

9.00 Eamonn & Ruth: A Million Pound Christmas. Eamonn Holmes and Ruth Langsford discover the most expensive ways in which people can enjoy the season of goodwill, beginning by sampling a £10,000 advent calendar.

10.00 Greatest Ever Christmas Movies. Countdown of the best festive films, from It's a Wonderful Life to Bad Santa. Featuring contributions by Gremlins star Zach Galligan and Miracle on 34th Street's Mara Wilson. (R)

12.55 Film: Scrooge – A Christmas Carol. (1951) **2.25** SuperCasino. **4.00** The Trafford Centre: Countdown to Christmas. (R) **4.50** House Doctor. (R) **5.20** Angels of Jarm. (R) **5.25** Roary the Racing Car. (R) **5.35** Milkshake! Bop Box. (R) **5.40** Peppa Pig. (R) **5.45** Paw Patrol.

DIGITAL

BBC Four

7.00 All Aboard! The Sleigh Ride **9.00** Top of the Pops Christmas Hits **10.30** Roy Orbison: One of the Lonely Ones **11.30** Steptoe and Son **12.15** Top of the Pops: 1982 **1.25** Shirley Bassey at the BBC **2.25** Top of the Pops **3.55** Close

ITV2

11.50 The Nation's Favourite Disney Song **12.50 Film:** Santa Paws 2: The Santa Pups (2012) **2.35 Film:** Mickey's Twice Upon a Christmas (2004) **4.00** The Smurfs: A Christmas Carol **4.25** You've Been Framed! at Christmas **5.25** Catchphrase Christmas Special **6.30** You've Been Framed! at Christmas **6.55 Film:** The Polar Express (2004) **9.00 Film:** Quantum of Solace (2008) **11.15** Family Guy **12.15** American Dad! **1.40** Celebrity Juice Christmas Special **2.35 Film:** Derailed (2005) **4.20** Educating Joey Essex: What Are You Sleighing? **5.05** Totally Bonkers Guinness World Records **5.30** Christmas Bonkers Guinness World Records **5.55** ITV2 Nightscreen

ITV3

11.45 Film: Columbo: The Conspirators (1978) **1.50** Hans Christian Andersen: My Life as a Fairy Tale **3.50** The Sound of Music Live! **6.30** The Making of The Sound of Music Live **7.00** Lewis **9.00** It'll Be Alright on the Night **10.00** Michael Flatley: A Night to Remember **11.00** The Suspicions of Mr Whicher **1.05** Inspector Morse **3.00** Hans Christian Andersen: My Life as a Fairy Tale **4.40** The Darling Buds of May **5.35** ITV3 Nightscreen

ITV4

12.10 Film: The Searchers (1956) **1.20** FYI Daily **1.25 Film:** The Searchers (1956) **2.30 Film:** The Horse Soldiers (1959) **5.00 Film:** Rio Bravo (1959) **7.50 Film:** Cannonball Run II (1984) **10.00 Film:** The Devil's Advocate (1997) **112.50 Film:** Road (2014) **3.00** Hell on Wheels **3.45** ITV4 Nightscreen **3.50** Tommy Cooper **4.15** The Professionals **5.10** Minder

E4

11.55 Film: Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules (2011) **2.00** Father Christmas **2.35** Prep & Landing **3.00** Prep & Landing: Naughty v Nice **3.25** The Big Bang Theory **9.00 Film:** The Inbetweeners Movie (2011) **11.05** Gogglebox **1.10** Rude Tube Christmas Cracker 2014 **2.15** Rude Tube **3.20** Rude Tube Christmas Cracker **4.10** Made in Chelsea Christmas **5.00** Melissa & Joey

Film4

11.00 Miracle on 34th Street (1994) **1.15** Arthur Christmas (2011) **3.15** Mr Popper's Penguins (2011) **5.05** Thunderbirds (2004) **6.50** Knight and Day (2010) **9.00** Last Vegas (2013) **11.10** The Transporter (2002) **12.55** Rear Window (1954) **3.15** Close

CHOICE

Peter Capaldi

Doctor Who (BBC1, 5.45pm)

It's been a bleak year for Whovians. Instead of having a full series to enjoy, there's been nothing apart from spin-off series Class. It's been delightful, but it's just not the same as having some Tardis action to get your teeth into. But, as they say, absence makes the heart grow fonder, and as Steven Moffat (who bows out as the showrunner next year) has had an extra 12 months to work on this single episode, we're expecting big things. Not that the BBC is letting fans know too much about it – as with previous episodes, it's only giving away the barest essentials. So we'll see Peter Capaldi's Time Lord travel to New York, where he comes face to face with a mysterious superhero called The Ghost.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **9.00** CBeebies The Nutcracker. **9.45** Legend of the Boneknapper Dragon. (R) **10.00** Christmas Day Service – Live from Bristol Cathedral. **11.00** Songs of Praise: Christmas Big Sing. **11.40** BBC News; Weather. **11.50 Film:** The Croods. (2013) **1.20** Shaun the Sheep: The Farmer's Llamas. (R) **1.50** Top of the Pops Christmas. **2.50** BBC News; Weather. **3.00** The Queen's Christmas Broadcast. **3.10 Film:** Frozen. (2013) **4.45** The Great Christmas Bake Off. **5.45** Doctor Who.

6.45 Strictly Come Dancing Christmas Special. Tess Daly and Claudia Winkleman host the festive special, with previous contestants Denise Lewis, Frankie Bridge, Pamela Stephenson, Ainsley Harriott, Gethin Jones and Melvin Odoom.

8.00 Call the Midwife. Christmas special, in which the nurses of Nonnatus House travel to South Africa to help the struggling staff of a mission clinic faced with closure. Sinead Cusack guest stars.

9.30 EastEnders. Any hopes of a merry Christmas seem slim with Phil's health deteriorating rapidly, Lee struggling with the burden of his secrets and the return of none other than Max Branning.

10.30 Mrs Brown's Boys Christmas Special. Grandad's health causes concern, Mrs Brown steps in when a fire at the salon leaves Rory and Dino with nowhere to work, while Dermot faces stiff competition to win a contract.

11.00 The Best of Tracey Ullman's Show. Highlights from the comedy sketch show, as well as some brand new material, including a look at what would happen if Clare Balding was left in charge of BBC's Christmas schedules.

11.30 BBC News; Weather.

11.45 On Christmas Night. Don Warrington reads the bible story of the shepherds' visit to the Christ Child.

11.50 Would I Lie to You? At Christmas. With Richard Osman, Tom Courtenay, Sara Pascoe and Chris Kamara. (R)

12.20 Have I Got a Bit More 2016 News for You. **1.05** Citizen Khan. (R) **1.35 Film:** While You Were Sleeping. (1995) **3.10** Weather for the Week Ahead. **3.15** BBC News.

BBC2

6.40 Countryfile. (R) **7.35 Film:** The Cat in the Hat. (2003) **8.50 Film:** Tom Thumb. (1958) **10.20 Film:** Bee Movie. (2007) **11.40** Carols from King's. (R) **12.55** Wild Tales From the Village. (R) **1.55** The Good Life. (R) **2.25 Film:** The Artist. (2011) Oscar-winning silent drama, starring Jean Dujardin. **4.00** Dancing the Nutcracker – Inside the Royal Ballet. **5.30** Sign Zone: The Queen's Christmas Broadcast. (R) **5.40** The Morecambe and Wise Christmas Show – 1976. (R)

6.45 Christmas University Challenge. Alumni of Magdalene College, Cambridge, and St Hilda's, Oxford compete in the penultimate first-round match of the special run of Christmas episodes. Jeremy Paxman hosts.

7.15 Blackadder's Christmas Carol. Kindly Victorian pushover Ebenezer Blackadder is visited by the Spirit of Christmas and gains an insight into the dastardly deeds of his ancestors. Starring Rowan Atkinson. (R)

8.00 Dad's Army. Pompous Captain Mainwaring proves he is a softie at heart by organising a Christmas treat for the struggling senior citizens of Walmington-on-Sea. (R)

8.30 Gospel Christmas. Gregory Porter and Beverley Knight host a concert from St John at Hackney, London, featuring the London Community Gospel Choir, the House Gospel Choir performing in front of a live audience, with guest vocalists including Katy B, Shaun Escoffery and vocal quintet Vadé.

9.30 Victorian Bakers at Christmas. The bakers prepare Victorian Christmas recipes, including twelfth cakes, bread-based punch, roasts to feed entire communities, and mince pies made with either beef or tripe.

10.30 QI XL. Sandi Toksvig and Alan Davies are joined by Josh Widdicombe, Susan Calman and Matt Lucas for an extended festive special, with a series of tough questions on the subject of Noel.

11.15 Film: Great Expectations. (2012) An orphan is given the chance to rise through high society with the assistance of a mysterious benefactor. Period drama, with Jeremy Irvine and Helena Bonham Carter.

1.15 Film: A Hard Day's Night. (1964) **2.40** This Is BBC Two.

ITV

6.00 CITV: Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids. **6.10** Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids. (R) **6.20** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.35** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.45** Super 4. (R) **6.55** Sooty. (R) **7.10** Oddbods. (R) **7.15** Oddbods. (R) **7.20** Almost Naked Animals. (R) **7.30** Almost Naked Animals. (R) **7.45** Horrid Henry. (R) **8.00** Horrid Henry. (R) **8.15** Horrid Henry. (R) **8.25** Weekend at Christmas. **9.25** Countrywise: Guide to Britain. (R) **9.55 Film:** Despicable Me 2. (2013) **11.55 Film:** Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets. (2002) **3.00** The Queen. **3.10 Film:** The Lion King. (1994) Disney animated musical, with the voice of Matthew Broderick. **4.55** ITV News; Weather. **5.15** You've Been Framed! Harry's Naughty List. **5.45** Emmerdale.

6.45 Paul O'Grady: For the Love of Dogs at Christmas. The comedian visits Battersea Dogs & Cats Home at Christmas, and tries to get a snaggle-toothed shih tzu the royal seal of approval when the Duchess of Cornwall drops by to open a new building. Paul also arranges an ultrasound for a heavily pregnant pug cross and nurses a dog with painfully bowed legs.

7.45 ITV News; Weather.

8.00 Coronation Street. Leanne is thrilled when Toyah returns to the cobbles, while Peter and Nick wind up brawling in the street, and Bethany collapses in the ginnel from an overdose.

9.00 Maigret's Dead Man. Rowan Atkinson stars as the Parisian detective in the second in a run of adaptations of Georges Simenon's books. Maigret is distracted from a string of attacks on three wealthy farms by a series of anonymous phone calls from a man who claims a gang is trying to kill him. He and his trusty associates LaPointe and Janvier go in search of the caller, which leads them to the discovery of a body that has been dumped out of a car. Maigret is convinced the corpse is the man who phoned him – but his face has been mutilated, making it impossible to confirm his identity.

11.00 Film: Love Actually. (2003) Interlinked tales of several people in search of love. Richard Curtis's romantic comedy, with Hugh Grant, Martine McCutcheon, Emma Thompson and Colin Firth.

1.30 Film: King Kong. (2005) **4.25** ITV Nightscreen.

CHANNEL 4

6.20 Prep & Landing: Naughty v Nice. (R) **6.40** The Bear. (R) **7.10** Painting the Bear Hunt. **7.15 Film:** Animals United. (2010) **8.55** The Simpsons. (R) **9.20** The Simpsons. (R) **9.50** The Simpsons. (R) **10.20** The Simpsons. (R) **10.50** Ice Age: A Mammoth Christmas. (R) **11.15** Painting the Bear Hunt. **11.20** Father Christmas. (R) **11.50** The Snowman. (R) **12.20 Film:** The Sword in the Stone. (1963) Disney animated adventure, with the voice of Rickie Sorenson. **2.05** The Alternative Christmas Message. **2.15** Channel 4 News. **2.20 Film:** It's a Wonderful Life. (1946) Fantasy drama, starring James Stewart. **4.55** The Snowman and the Snowdog. (R) **5.25** We're Going on a Bear Hunt. (R)

6.00 Film: Home Alone. (1990) A boy has to fend for himself when he is accidentally left behind after his family jets off to Paris for Christmas. The youngster initially enjoys his freedom, but is soon forced to resort to ingenious booby traps to defend the family home from two dim-witted burglars. Comedy, starring Macaulay Culkin, Joe Pesci, Daniel Stern, John Heard, Catherine O'Hara and John Candy.

8.00 Travel Man: 48 Hours in Florence. Rebel Wilson joins Richard Ayoade on a rapid-fire tour of the Italian city, taking in as much as they can in just two days. They race past iconic works of art including Botticelli's Venus and Michelangelo's David, take in some street art, go on a rafting trip down the River Arno, climb to the top of the city's cathedral and dine on a traditional tripe sandwich.

9.00 Gogglebox 2016. A look back at some of the highlights of this year's series, featuring regular armchair presenters Leon and June, Christopher and Stephen, and the Michaels family offering their thoughts on popular and topical TV shows.

10.30 Alan Carr's Christmas Chatty Man. The host is joined for this Christmas special by guests including Tom Daley, Gary Barlow, Dannii Minogue and Martin Kemp, with music from Emeli Sandé and Robbie Williams.

12.35 Film: Four Christmases. (2008) **2.05** Rude Tube Christmas Cracker 2016. (R) **3.05** Very British Problems at Christmas. (R) **4.00** Location, Location, Location. (R) **5.00** Supershoppers. (R) **5.25** The Restoration Man. (R)

CHANNEL 5

6.10 Milkshake!: Milkshake! Festive Fun. **6.15** Shimmer and Shine. **6.40** Paw Patrol. (R) **7.00** Angelina Ballerina. (R) **7.20** Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom. (R) **7.35 Film:** An American in Paris. (1951) Romantic musical, starring Gene Kelly and Leslie Caron. **9.50 Film:** On the Town. (1949) Musical, starring Gene Kelly, Frank Sinatra and Jules Munshin. **11.50 Film:** Scrooge. (1970) Musical fantasy, starring Albert Finney. **2.10 Film:** The Wizard of Oz. (1939) Musical fantasy, starring Judy Garland. **4.10 Film:** Singin' in the Rain. (1952) Musical comedy, starring Gene Kelly.

6.15 Britain's Favourite Xmas Songs. A countdown of popular songs that are guaranteed to make any Christmas party go with a swing. Highlights include the Jackson 5's Santa Claus Is Coming to Town, Greg Lake's I Believe in Father Christmas, the Waitresses' Christmas Wrapping and the Pogues and Kirsty MacColl's Fairytale of New York. Is Mud's Lonely This Christmas past its sell-by date? Will Jona Lewie ever Stop the Cavalry? And where would any Christmas party be without Slade and their classic anthem Merry Xmas Everybody? But which one will top the nation's festive chart? Featuring contributions by artists, producers, video directors, composers and journalists, who shed light on the creation of the songs and their accompanying videos. (R)

8.30 When Celebrities Go Pop. A countdown of the 40 most memorable musical efforts by celebrities who have decided to diversify into music. The programme features performances by Mr T, Katie Price, Vinnie Jones, Sam Fox, Eddie "The Eagle" Edwards, David Hasselhoff, an assortment of soap stars and Christopher Lee, who embarked on a second career as a heavy-metal singer in his 80s.

10.30 Film: Dallas Buyers Club. (2013) Premiere. A man diagnosed with HIV sets up an organisation to smuggle drugs for treating the condition into the US. Fact-based drama, starring Matthew McConaughey and Jared Leto.

12.45 Greatest Ever Christmas Songs. (R) **1.10** SuperCasino. Live interactive gaming. **3.10** Chris Tarrant: On the Xmas Express. (R) **4.00** Now That's Funny! (R) **4.50** House Doctor. (R) **5.40** Angels of Jarm. (R) **5.50** Roary the Racing Car. (R)

DIGITAL

BBC Four

7.00 King Lear **10.10** The Good Old Days: Christmas 1976 **11.00** Top of the Pops Christmas Hits **12.00** Old Grey Whistle Test: 70's Gold **1.30** All Aboard! The Sleigh Ride **3.30** Close

ITV2

11.00 You've Been Framed! With Bells On **11.35** Emmerdale **12.00** Coronation Street **1.05 Film:** The Polar Express (2004) **3.10** You've Been Framed! **4.15** Catchphrase Christmas Special **5.15** Minion Madness **5.30 Film:** One Hundred and One Dalmatians (1961) **7.15 Film:** Mr Bean's Holiday (2007) **9.00 Film:** Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason (2004) **11.15** Family Guy **1.10** American Dad! **2.05** The Cleveland Show **2.30 Film:** Not Another Teen Movie (2001) **4.10** The Almost Impossible Gameshow **5.00** Planet's Funniest Animals **5.45** ITV2 Nightscreen

ITV3

11.30 Film: Carry On Cleo (1964) **1.25 Film:** Carry On Girls (1973) **3.15 Film:** Carry On Camping (1969) **5.05 Film:** Carry On Up the Jungle (1970) **7.00 Film:** Carry On Cowboy (1966) **9.00 Film:** Steptoe and Son Ride Again (1973) **11.00 Film:** The Sting (1973) **1.40 Film:** The Four Musketeers (1974) **3.35** Wycliffe **5.00** Doctor at Large **5.25** Movies Now **5.35** ITV3 Nightscreen

ITV4

11.30 Film: The Green Berets (1968) **2.20 Film:** Dunkirk (1958) **5.05 Film:** Where Eagles Dare (1968) **8.10 Film:** Jaws: The Revenge (1987) **10.00 Film:** Body of Lies (2008) **12.35 Film:** The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo (2011) **3.30** Hell on Wheels **4.15** The Wine Show **5.10** Goodwood Classic Cars

E4

11.25 Rude(ish) Tube Shorts **11.30** Baby Daddy **12.30** How I Met Your Mother **2.30** The Goldbergs **3.00** The Big Bang Theory: Festive Guests **6.00** Frozen at Christmas **7.00** The Snowman **7.35** The Snowman and the Snowdog **8.00** The Big Bang Theory **9.00 Film:** The Inbetweeners 2 (2014) **11.00** The Inbetweeners **1.20** Tattoo Fixers at Christmas **2.25** Virtually Famous Christmas Special **3.10** The Inbetweeners **3.35** Hollyoaks

Film4

11.00 Rio (2011) **12.50** Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs (2009) **2.35** Cheaper By the Dozen (2003) **4.25** The Princess Diaries (2001) **6.35** The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel (2011) **9.00** Thor (2011) **11.15** Your Highness (2011) **1.20** Vertigo (1958) **4.00** Close

PICK OF THE WEEK

FILM CHOICES

BOXING DAY
Captain Phillips, ITV, 9pm
An American cargo ship sets a dangerous course around the coast of Somalia, while inland, four men are pressed into service as pirates by the local warlords. The captain is taken hostage when the raiding party hijacks the vessel, resulting in a tense five-day crisis. Fact-based thriller, starring Tom Hanks and Barkhad Abdi. (2013)

TUESDAY
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, ITV, 7.30pm
The teenage wizard is chosen to represent Hogwarts School in a dangerous magical tournament. Fourth instalment of the fantasy saga, starring Daniel Radcliffe and Robert Pattinson. (2005)

Captain Phillips, Boxing Day, ITV, 9pm

WEDNESDAY
Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, ITV, 7.30pm
The young wizard struggles to convince his fellow sorcerers that the evil Lord Voldemort has returned to life. When Hogwarts headmaster Dumbledore is ousted in favour of a sadistic replacement, Harry realises he must take matters into his own hands, uniting his fellow pupils to form a secret army and training them for the inevitable confrontation to come. Adventure sequel, starring Daniel Radcliffe. (2007)

THURSDAY
Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull, BBC1, 11.20pm
The globe-trotting archaeologist races against Soviet agents to find a mysterious artefact of untold power. Action adventure sequel, starring Harrison Ford and Cate Blanchett. (2008)

FRIDAY
Captain America: The Winter Soldier, BBC1, 8.30pm
The superhuman soldier becomes an operative for secret intelligence agency SHIELD, but grows suspicious of their motives. Following a battle with a mysterious cyborg assassin, he and fellow Avenger Black Widow become fugitives, and try to bring down a sinister conspiracy. Comic-book thriller sequel, starring Chris Evans. (2014)

Money matters in this mystery tale of murder

ITV may have brought us the definitive version of Hercule Poirot, but the BBC feels like the small screen home of Agatha Christie.

It has adapted the Miss Marple cases, and broadcast adventures based on the Tommy and Tuppence characters last year, as well as a blockbusting version of And Then There Were None.

The latter was shown during the festive season, and this year, there's another all-star Christie feast for fans – this take of her classic short story, The Witness for the Prosecution.

"And Then There Were None made a huge impact last year, garnering great reviews and audiences of over eight million," remarks executive producer Karen Thrussell. "We're thrilled to be reunited with Sarah Phelps as she takes on another iconic title, an incendiary courtroom drama that will keep you guessing right to the very end. The source material is so strong, and we hope the end result will be every bit as striking as And Then There Were None."

The Witness for the Prosecution is no stranger to screen treatment, of course. The BBC made the first version way back in 1949; a US version made it to TV in 1953, the same year it was first produced as a stage play.

Perhaps the most famous adaptation came in 1957 when it was turned into a movie by none other than the legendary Billy Wilder, who cast Charles Laughton, Marlene Dietrich and Tyrone Power (in his final completed part) in the lead roles.

Then, in 1982, another TV drama followed, this time featuring an all-star cast that included Ralph Richardson, Deborah Kerr, Donald Pleasence and Wendy Hiller. It was recently announced that Ben Affleck will direct and star in a future take on the tale.

Filming for the latest production based on the story took place in Liverpool this summer and sees Toby Jones, Andrea Riseborough, Kim Cattrall and David Haig taking lead roles.

"With the long terrible shadow of the Great War falling across the rackety, feral 1920s, The Witness For The Prosecution is a compelling story of deceit, desire, murder, money and morality, innocence and guilt, heartbreak and – most painful and dangerous of all – love," says Phelps. "At the centre of this dark and tangled net is the astonishing character of Romaine, a noir heroine for all our times."

Romaine is an enigmatic chorus girl and the partner of Leonard Vole, a young chancer who has been accused of the brutal murder of the enormously wealthy Emily French. She's been found in her handsome 1920s London residence and, having left her fortune to Vole, he certainly had a motive to kill her.

Vole is convinced that Romaine can prove his innocence, but he is in for a terrible surprise…

"Combining Sarah's brilliance with the excellent and skilful eye of our director, Julian Jarrold, we expect to deliver a show that will thrill both audiences who have enjoyed Christie's work before and those who are coming to it for the first time," claims Hilary Strong, CEO of Agatha Christie Ltd.

Let's hope her verdict is the right one!

The Witness for the Prosecution, Boxing Day, BBC1, 9pm

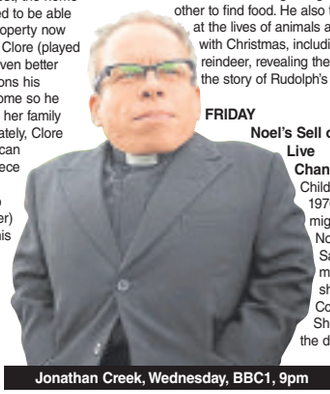
BEST OF THE REST

BOXING DAY
Still Open All Hours
BBC1, 8.30pm
Granville and Gastric find themselves playing marriage counsellors, while Leroy adopts a festive disguise to avoid relationship trouble of a different kind. Meanwhile, Mrs Featherstone struggles to get into the Christmas spirit and Kath attempts to bring the street together as one harmonious choir of carollers to beat Finkle Street once and for all - but does Granville have a trick up his sleeve to help them out? David Jason, Tim Healy, James Baxter and Stephanie Cole star.

TUESDAY
There's a Croc in My Kitchen
Channel 5, 8pm
Documentary following people around Britain who keep predatory wild animals as unusual pets. Chris Weller from Kent owns a crocodile, and spent £20,000 converting his house to accommodate the dangerous reptile, while in Gloucester, Patricia and her sons live with a serval, a big cat that is one of Africa's deadliest hunters. Jim and Chris own a 20-stone Komodo dragon, while Terry fears his pet lynx Pudding may have been poisoned. Devon resident Andre owns a wolf hybrid that shares her bed – but fears he may be on his last legs.

WEDNESDAY
Jonathan Creek
BBC1, 9pm
It's not quite a Christmas ghost story, but there's definitely a spooky element to Jonathan's latest case, which centers on Daemons' Roost, the home of a 19th-century sorcerer who claimed to be able to summon the powers of Hell. The property now belongs to horror film director Nathan Clore (played by Ken Bones, which is arguably an even better name for a gore maestro) who summons his stepdaughter Alison (Georgie Lord) home so he can explain exactly what happened to her family there when she was a child. Unfortunately, Clore suffers a debilitating stroke before he can come clean, leaving Alison to try to piece together the mystery together herself. Jonathan may be just the man to help her, but his wife Polly (Sarah Alexander) believes he's already got enough on his plate. Meanwhile, the Reverend Wendell Wilkie (Warwick Davis) also finds himself drawn into the mystery.

THURSDAY
Life in the Snow
BBC1, 8pm
Gordon Buchanan goes in search of animals that live in snowy conditions and have adapted to survive in cold weather. The programme features polar bears raising their cubs, owls keeping their supplies of food hidden under a layer of snow, penguins that huddle together for warmth, and wolverines and ravens working alongside each other to find food. He also takes a look at the lives of animals associated with Christmas, including robins and reindeer, revealing the truth behind the story of Rudolph's red nose.


Jonathan Creek, Wednesday, BBC1, 9pm

FRIDAY
Noel's Sell or Swap Live
Channel 4, 7pm
Children of the 1970s and 1980s might remember Noel Edmonds' Saturday morning TV show Multi Coloured Swap Shop which, in the days before the internet, gave kids a chance to offload their junk by exchanging it for someone else's. So, prepare to feel nostalgic as Noel hosts this familiar-sounding programme, in which guests get a chance to bid on an eclectic mix of items. The owners will also be there to explain why they are getting rid off their stuff – it might be an unwanted present, something bought in haste, or the cause of a series of family rows. Or perhaps they just thought it would be more fun to be on the TV then to sell it online. Either way, Noel and his SoS team are here to help.

Judi Dench: All the World's Her Stage
BBC2, 8pm
She's one of Britain's greatest actors and has also been dubbed 'the second most popular woman in Britain' (presumably the Queen pipped her to the top spot). Now this documentary, narrated by Colin Salmon, looks back over her remarkable 60-year career, and finds out just why she has become such an institution. The actors sharing their memories of working with her include Daniel Craig, Sir Ian McKellen and Billy Connolly, who reminisces about the time he though Judi was falling for him on the set of Mrs Brown. Former Miss Moneypenny Samantha Bond reveals that she had to calm Pierce Bronsnan's nerves before his first scene with the legendary actress.

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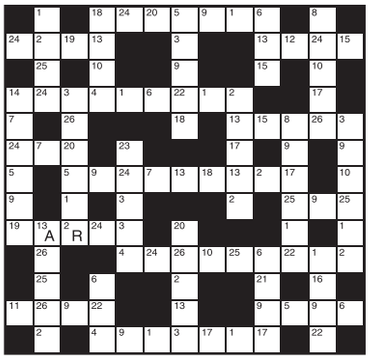
BRAIN GYM No.409

Codeword

Each number in the grid represents a different letter of the alphabet and every letter of the alphabet is used. Use the given letter(s) to the right of the main grid to start you off.



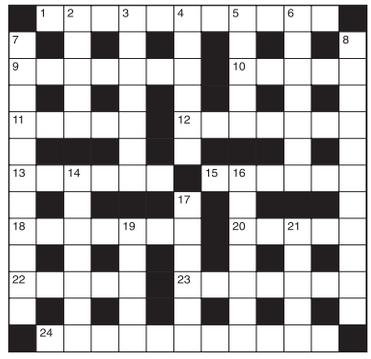
1	14
2 R	15
3	16
4	17
5	18
6	19
7	20
8	21
9	22
10	23
11	24
12	25
13 A	26

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
D	H	G	B	Q	K	P	N	L	Y	Z	A	W
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
J	S	O	E	I	V	U	F	C	X	T	M	R

Double Crossword

Choose either quick or cryptic clues - both fit the same grid.



Cryptic Clues:

Across

1. Service chiefs? (4,7)
9. They may be black or white pelts (7)
10. Get to a stretch of the river (5)
11. The car that creates records (5)
12. His choice will get cross (7)
13. Father's attempt to be a kind of cook (6)
15. Scarcity of thread, perhaps (6)
18. Train that is brought to absolute rest (7)
20. Excel in striking a note (5)
22. It comes back to beat a giant (5)
23. At least a soldier will be (7)
24. A case of mixed dates (11)

Down

2. Turn out a bad scholar? (5)
3. She puts on other people's clothes (7)
4. Result of a questionable action? (6)
5. All-male crew of a novel boat (5)
6. Person goes round a nuclear establishment (7)
7. Fit to take possession (11)
8. Time may be on its side (6,5)
14. Don't allow bitterness to remain (7)
16. Perhaps ore is turned up on wearing away of the soil (7)
17. Soldier with papers in order (6)
19. The keynote of medicine (5)
21. Is in too much hurry to use the letter-opener? (5)

Quick Clues:

Across

1. Being tested (2,9)
9. Stupid (7)
10. Engine (5)
11. Bit (5)
12. Feeling (7)
13. Spent (6)
15. Mourn (6)
18. Harbour (7)
20. Unsullied (5)
22. Proportion (5)
23. Ingenuous (7)
24. Disbelief (11)

Down

2. Sound (5)
3. Withdraw (7)
4. Squabble (6)
5. Time (5)
6. Exterior (7)
7. Indignation (11)
8. Insobriety (11)
14. Raze (7)
16. Narration (7)
17. Filament (6)
19. Smell (5)
21. Upright (5)

Sudoku

		7		8		2		4
	3							5
	8	2	6		4			
			8	6			3	
3	6		9		2		4	
	7				5			
			3		9	6	2	
7				5				3
1		3		4	6		5	

Fill in the grid below so that every column, every row and each of the 3x3 boxes contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS >

2	9	5	6	1	7	4	8	3
8	4	3	2	5	9	6	1	7
1	7	6	3	4	8	2	9	5
6	8	4	1	9	5	3	7	2
5	2	1	4	7	3	9	6	8
7	3	9	8	6	2	1	5	4
4	5	7	9	3	1	8	2	6
3	1	8	5	2	6	7	4	9
9	6	2	7	8	4	5	3	1

LAST WEEK'S CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS: CRYPTIC - Across: 1 Crossbar; 5 Spot; 9 Anti; 10 Overcome; 11 Dowry; 12 Raiders; 13 Grappling iron; 18 Narrates; 19 Fifi; 20 Realize; 21 Sarah; 22 Last; 23 Stipends. Down: 2 Rancour; 3 Stirrup; 4 Advertisement; 6 Pioneer; 7 Treason; 8 Trying; 13 General; 14 Airways; 15 Placid; 16 Inflate; 17 Off-hand. QUICK - Across: 1 Communal; 5 Wash; 9 Keen; 10 Relevant; 11 Calms; 12 Edifice; 13 Glamorousness; 18 Vertical; 19 Mine; 20 Revenue; 21 Anger; 22 Silt; 23 Recalled. Down: 2 Overall; 3 Minimum; 4 An eye for an eye; 6 Avarice; 7 Hotness; 8 Remiss; 13 Governs; 14 Arrival; 15 Orient; 16 Nominal; 17 Sincere.

Thinking space

Quiz

1. Which religion's holy book is the Guru Granth Sahib?
2. Which sporting entertainers were founded in 1927 by Abraham Saperstein?
3. What, in the SI system, replaced the erg?
4. Which singer's autobiography is called Take Me Home?
5. What was Queen Victoria's residence on the Isle of Wight?
6. Which king of England was James VII of Scotland?
7. Who provides the voice for wicked Uncle Scar in The Lion King?
8. Whose band were the Crickets?
9. Which US state is nicknamed the Garden State?
10. Who originally conducted the Three Tenors?

Last week's solutions:

Quiz: 1 Eight; 2 Elgar; 3 Jack Straw; 4 St. Bernadette; 5 A monkey; 6 Guy Gibson; 7 Anna Pasternak; 8 Carpathians; 9 Barbarossa; 10 Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

Niner: GERANIUMS

Niner

Each number from 1 to 9 represents a different letter. Solve the clues and insert the letters in the appropriate squares to discover a word which uses all nine letters.

9628745 gives a hard rock,
13784 gives a hard stone,
9674 gives small stones.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

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Sandwell Chronicle Thursday, December 22, 2016

Hot dog with a difference – Mac and Cheese Dog

Burger Priest in busy spot in Wolverhampton city centre

Are you sitting comfortably – variety of seating choices

High Priest Burger – one of the many choices

Praise be! It's a Priestly burger

Pete Cashmore tucks in

IN the beginning, there was the burger, and the burger was. . . well, not very good.

It's fair to say that it has taken the UK some time to master the hamburger. Once the only options you were McDonalds, Wimpy, and the kind of hot food vans you get at Wolves matches.

Not exactly an embarrassment of riches. Eventually Burger King came along and upped the burger game somewhat.

Then The Gourmet Burger Kitchen arrived and changed all that, reasoning that if you were going to be a burger chain, then people might be willing to pay a bit more money and come back for more if the burgers were, you know, actually half-decent.

And so burgers got posh. Rather than the embarrassingly perfunctory slabs of meat and processed cheese on offer at high street fast food establishments, you now get things like dry-aged steak, smoked Applewood cheese, onion jam, truffle mayonnaise and avocado.

The success of Gourmet Burger Kitchen proved that there was a market for Fancy Dan poshburgers, and indeed the subsequent rise of Five Guys, of which there are two in Birmingham, proved that you could apply the posh burger ethos to a fast food environment and make it work.

Any city worth its salt has at least one posh burger joint in its midst, and it was with this in mind that, a few months back, Wolverhampton welcomed Burger Priest. How could it possibly fail? It's in a prime location opposite House Of Fraser, with a whole load of footfall due to the fact that the Man On The Oss is around the corner.

Which is why it's puzzling that when myself and my dinner date arrived at 8pm on a Saturday, the place was all but deserted, with more serving staff than customers.

It may well be that we were in some kind of post-dinner, pre-chucking out time lull, or that word of mouth hasn't started working for Burger Priest yet. What this at least meant was that we got to take up one of the sofas in the funky interior – there are sofas, regular tables and high-stool diner-style counters to choose from. As we entered, Rosanna by Toto was playing on the music system which I took as a good sign. Largely, I was proved correct.

It's a fascinating proposition, is Burger Priest, with a menu full of the weird and the eccentric and the occasionally downright loopy. If you wanted, for example, you could feast on something called the Surf'n'Turf Burger, six ounces of meat patties on a bun, with lobster tail meat and seafood sauce.

Trimmings

Another option might be the Mac and Cheese Dog, which as the name suggests is a Frankfurter sausage on a bun, topped with crispy bacon and macaroni and cheese. I think it's fair to say that one has enough stodge for anyone.

My comrade and I decided to play it safe and go for the Altar Burger, one each, which is simply a double-patty burger with bacon, smoked Applewood cheese and all the salad trimmings. You have the option of piling on some extras at no extra cost if you feel the need, which I obviously did, and so I decided to throw in a layer of sautéed mushrooms too – sautéed onions, bell peppers and beef tomato are among some of the other choices.

Now, initially I had intended to just get a burger and fries, but at the last minute I had a rush of blood to the head and decided that my side should be salted beef poutine, consisting of French fries in meat gravy with cheese curd.

Well it seems like Burger Priest subscribe to the American model of meat patty – basically, shape a big lump of beef until it is roughly round and then slap it on the grill with the minimum of frills and let it go. The smoked cheese is, I would argue, the perfect cheese to accompany a burger, and the bacon was thick and rustic.

Burger Priest definitely isn't for everyone – it's loud, it's funky, it's a bit brash and you have to be prepared to literally get your hands dirty. My suggestion to them would be to provide their customers with multiple wet wipes and then they'd be nudging true greatness. Even so, they claim to treat their meaty products with a touch of the divine, and in me, they have a new convert.

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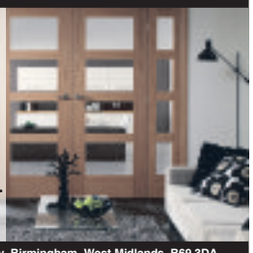

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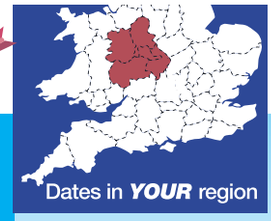

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JEAN, mature lady, genuine with many hobbies, slim, blonde and attractive. WLTM interesting gent with GSOH, must be cheerful, looks unimportant. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424675**

HI Gents, I'm Kelly, a down to earth lady, 35yrs, shapely brunette, seeking someone with GSOH, looks unimportant, any age. ACA, I promise! **Tel: 0906 515 3024 Box 423035**

CHRISTINE, 40, attractive slim sporty brunette seeks fit well built male. Call me let's see what the future brings. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 425061**

NAUGHTY curvy 46yr old lady, outgoing and bubbly with a naughty side and lots of banter, WLTM chap 30+. If you are married even better. ACA. **Tel: 0906 515 3012 Box 424543**

LOUISE, 29, curvy red haired female, been hurt in the past seeks male to buy her flowers and mend her broken heart. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 425041**

SARAH, 39yrs, married, seeking chap for no strings intimate times. Special friendship, mutual respect. Give me a call. **Tel: 0906 515 3028 Box 408291**

LYN, 47, curvy quiet sensitive brunette but with a wild side. It could be exciting to know me! **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 425013**

TAMIKA, mature black beauty, hourglass figure and open minded. Pls call if you are discreet, broad minded and nice. I can travel and accommodate. ACA. **Tel: 0906 515 3004 Box 422365**

RETIRED happy, caring, attractive female, likes gardening, travel, animals, comedy, seeks tall, funny, kind chap, Shropshire. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 411459**

AMANDA, 36, tall, slim, busty brunette seeks man, any age, any area, for discreet daytime fun. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418117**

KATIE 35yrs, slender well educated brunette seeks no strings mutual pleasure with gent 40+ Must be discreet, married or single. ACA. **Tel: 0906 515 3000 Box 419673**

SANDRA, smart, sophisticated lady young looking 60s, genuine and kind seeks gent with GSOH, looks unimportant. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424671**

JANE, young 41, very broadminded seeks chap any age for discreet no strings fun, any age, no time wasters ACA. **Tel: No: 0906 515 3008 Box: 409715**

CAROL, mid 50s lady, young at heart, attractive and sexy (so I'm told)! Give me a call if you are a gent with GSOH. ACA. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424783**

SOPHIA young 40yrs, married but bored, seeks discreet adult fun, any area, all calls answered. **Tel: 0906 515 3016 Box: 413399**

SUE, 60s lady, calling all gents who seek a mature solvent stylish lady, I can wine and dine you, you will have a nice time, call or text me. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424781**

EMILY, mature well educated lady, blonde and smart and broadminded seeks gent any age for no strings fun. ACA. **Tel: 0906 515 3020 Box 421375**

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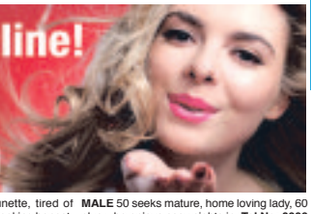

JOSIE, sexy black lady, 52yrs seeks adult times with concerning gent, any age, discreet clean, womanly figure. **Text only Mailbox: 4028592**

MARY, passionate honest slim blue-eyed blonde, 39yrs, likes nights in/out, looking for affectionate male, any age to spend adult fun times. Interested? call me. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 425009**

ANNABELLE, sophisticated 28yrs hoping to meet older gent for adult fun, discreet, sincere, genuine advertiser. **Text only Mailbox: 4157105**

KAREN, 47, an attractive blue-eyed redhead, curvy size 16, likes films, football, pubs, reading, seeking likeminded male for nights in/out, hopefully more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 425057**

MELINDA, 52yrs, attractive and broad minded seeking chap any age for some fun. Couples also. **Text only Mailbox: 4131946**

JULIE attractive 35yr old female with a great body, looking for no strings attached evening meets. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 425037**

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SUZANNA, 45, lonely beautiful classy French lady looking for happy decent reliable very sexy man for lots of TLC and good times. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424847**

SARAH, young looking curvy 41yr old female, bored with everyday routines, WLTM up for some fun discreet and extremely broadminded younger male. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424827**

DEBBIE, 50, petite blonde looking for some fun and adventure with similar fun loving mature male. Looks unimportant. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424799**

JACKIE, 56yrs, attractive lady who is lots of fun seeks like-minded gent for nights in, days out and much much more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424491**

DONNA, 42, bright bubbly blue eyed blonde looking for someone to enjoy life and love to the full with. Call me. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424873**

MARY, professional mature lady, loves life, very sociable and fun, seeks gent for good conversation and happy times. All calls and texts answered. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424775**

SUE, attractive genuine lady, own home, loves to spoil a man, give me a call or text. ACA. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424673**

BARBARA, 36, slim blonde, likes music, sport, the outdoors, quiet nights in etc, WLTM kind honest gent to share interests and get to know me. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424549**

HELEN, mid 50's naughty lady seeks some fun times with gent any age. ACA. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424493**

ANGELA, 48yrs, seeks male companion for nights out, dining, maybe more. ACA or text me. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424495**

JULIE, 53yrs, tall, slim, dark haired lady, sociable and fun loving, new to the area so WLTM men friends for fun, maybe more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424497**

SEXY brunette 39, petite, brown eyes, seeks energetic discreet guy for no strings fun and friendship. Age/status unimportant. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424451**

ANDREA, 43, slim with long dark hair, blue eyes, loves to dance seeks romantic man to share intimate moments in or out. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424747**

DIVORCED female, attractive, sensual by nature, OHAC, bored with own company, looking to make life a little more exciting with likeminded man. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424591**

JANE 40's, blonde blue-eyed petite build, WLTM understanding discreet tall, caring man for daytime meets. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424769**

PATRICIA, 50s, solvent female, tactile, fun, likes to travel, seeks tall, easygoing mature male to enjoy all the good things in life with. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424553**

HI I'm Ellie, 39, pretty, funny, great figure, OHAC/child, have everything apart from a man, WLTM someone I wanna be with, not have to be. Call me. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424635**

ATTRACTIVE professional lady, 57, widow, likes dining out, country pubs, good conversation and laughter, seeks genuine professional gent, with a gosh with similar interests, to enjoy life with. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424157**

CALL or text me, I'm Claire, single, 41yrs loves life to the full, hoping you will contact me if you want a genuine fun time. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424779**

SARAH, mature feminine lady, kind caring but still has a sensual side, hoping to meet like minded, confident, non smoking gent with GSOH, looks unimportant. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424777**

PROFESSIONAL lady, mid 60s, interests include gardening, theatre, walking, days out and travelling, animal lover, looking for a professional gentleman, kind and caring, intellectual and outgoing, with gosh, for friendship, possibly more, in the Stafford area. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424569**

MELANIE, 49yrs, varied interests, attractive, sensual lady seeks gent any age or status, call, see what happens. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424337**

CALLING all Gentlemen! I'm Janet a mature solvent stylish lady, I'm waiting for you to call me so we can wine/dine and have some good times ACA. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424335**

BABS, single mum looking for adult companionship, any age/looks or status. Interested? Come on over to my place. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424253**

HI I'm Angie, attractive petite mid 50s lady. I'm a very very active lady, with lots of interests. WLTM chap with GSOH, looks/age unimportant. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424333**

HELLO Gents, I'm a mature attractive interesting lady, with gorgeous eyes. I'm smart, sophisticated, love theatre and films. Give me a call or text me. Looks unimportant, must be kind. ACA. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424331**

SICK of being stuck on the shelf, Jenny, 45, attractive female seeks N/S caring male 42-55 who feels the same to share adult companionship, meals in/out, possibly LTR. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424225**

SENSUAL tactile, attractive female, long blonde hair, blue eyes, loves travel, wining/dining, WLTM genuine male for mutual companionship. Looks unimportant. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424231**

HI I'm Pam, 42, slim, blonde, green eyes, discreet, loves cuddles, seeking similar discreet tactile male for mutual friendship with benefits. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424101**

LOUISE, 39, tactile good-looking solvent female WLTM spontaneous male for holidays, spoiling and lots of fun times. Age/looks/status unimportant. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424055**

NAOMI, 43, attractive fun loving female with lots of love to offer a genuine caring guy. Come on, lets share all the good things life has to offer together! **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424085**

CLARA, 32yr Irish lass working away from home and friends, lonely and looking for older male companionship with no ties or complications. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424021**

FEMALE 50, seeks male of similar age for friendship, possible relationship. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 350529**

HEATHER, 48, well travelled solvent brunette looking to share a large glass of wine and whatever follows with affectionate man friend. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424429**

TERRI, attractive young looking 29yrs, long legged sporty seeking nice man to fall in love with, up to 45yrs. If that's you pls call, you have nothing to lose. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424377**

SUSAN, 43, pretty green eyed brunette looking for an interesting attractive man who would understand my wicked sense of humour. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424381**

JOY attractive Asian female 37, loves to dance, looking for older English gent to teach me some new steps, fall in love with, spoil, pamper and make feel very special. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424255**

WENDY, 44yrs, dark haired beauty with blue eyes and a fab figure. WLTM gent any age, give me a call and I promise to call you back, or text/email. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424339**

RENATA, 55, slim, attractive lady with long auburn hair just wants to have a good time with likeminded older guy up to 75yrs. Looks/status unimportant. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424263**

LOUISE, 40, elegant genuine blonde who's been hurt in the past seeks tall handsome male to be her Mr Right. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424261**

ELLA, 46, slim confident brunette, tired of spending lonely nights alone, seeking honest, romantic male to enjoy nights out, hopefully leading to more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424015**

JANE, attractive blonde lady, genuine, sincere, likes theatre, meals out, looking to meet nice looking professional single man. **Text only Mailbox: 5535192**

JULIE, attractive early 40's brunette, size 10, varied interests, WLTM male for fun times, good conversations, spoiling and maybe more. status unimportant. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 423903**

LYN, 39yrs, dark hair and blue eyes, WLTM action man of any age for fun and games. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 423899**

AMY 31yr old single mum, new to the area, looking to meet male companion to help make me settle in and feel special again, age/status unimportant. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424051**

TALL, slim and curvy woman, 57,,attractive with GSOH and varied interests, seeks similar man 50-65 Bristol area, for discreet assignations. **Text only Mailbox: 5546538**

DIANE, loving and caring, young 72 year old, blond hair, brown eyes, smoker, looking for genuine male with gosh, for friendship. Walsall area. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424025**

Single Men

MALE, 64, single, n/s, likes music, films, driving, nights in, dining out, trips, WLTM lady, 50-70, looks unimportant, for friendship and relationship. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424927**

CARING male, 55, N/S, medium build, likes meals out, music, cinema, sports, driving, seeks female, 40-60 for friendship. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 239148**

HONEST male, 60s, N/S, GSOH, car owner, seeks female, 55-70 for friendship, maybe more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 416817**

MALE, 63, caring, easygoing, N/S seeks female 50-70 for friendship and romance. Looks unimportant. Likes occasional drink, eating in/out, cinema and driving. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418893**

CHRISTIAN male 51, seeking Christian female, 35-45 for friendship, possibly more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 423747**

MATURE male, 50, medium-build, varied interests, seeks true Christian female, 35-45, who enjoys evenings in and dining out, for friendship or possibly more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419283**

MALE, 59, 5ft2, dark hair, looking for a lady, 50-60, to share the good things in life. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424759**

IAN, 5ft8, medium build, OHAC, late 50s, likes most things, holidays, gardening, motorbikes, WLTM similar aged lady, 50-60, with nice personality. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 421345**

MIKE 49, slim, young looks, seeks female, 35-50 for friendship and going out. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 356651**

DAVE, 54, 5ft10, medium build, easy going, happy, looking for an attractive, loving and caring female, 45-65, for friendship and relationship. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 423073**

YOUNG 70 widower, fit, lonely, 5ft 11ins, 11st, likes drives, walks, DIY, meals out, gardening, smoker, looking for lady to spend life with. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424687**

BIG is beautiful is larger is lovelier, Steve 58, seeking broadminded, adventurous BBW for fun times. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 412031**

TOM, 32, slim, attractive, own home, likes to eat out and in, WLTM honest, kind girl for tender, loving care and fun times. No time-wasters please. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424929**

MALE 50 seeks mature, home loving lady, 60 plus who enjoys cosy nights in. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424683**

MARTIN trustworthy, warm hearted, loving, reliable male, 45, 6ft, medium build, young at heart, GSOH, seeks female, 50-60 for friendship, maybe more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424681**

MARK 48, slim, fit, GSOH, looking for loyal partner for LTR. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424679**

CARING 55yr old male, widower, 6ft 3ins, WLTM lady, 40-55 for fun and laughter, maybe happy ever after. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424677**

MALE 57, attractive, seeks mature woman any age for close fun, married or single. **Text only Mailbox: 5410860**

ANY mature women over 60 seeking adult fun - this attractive male 58 will cater for your needs, any size or status. **Text only. Mailbox: 5410860**

WIDOWER, 60s, GSOH, n/s, likes places of interest, country walks, cats and dogs, music, theatre and cinema, still looking for a lady, around 55-65, for companionship, ACA. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424709**

ATTRACTIVE, tall, dark, professional male, 50, GSOH, easygoing, enjoys sport, socialising, good company, looking to meet attractive female for fun, adventure and take things from there. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424563**

59YR old male, likes country walks, pub lunches, seeks lady for friendship, maybe more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424685**

IAN, GSOH, 60, looking for somebody to go out with and have a good time, a good laugh, maybe things will move on, I'm young at heart so looking for younger female if possible, NSA. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424357**

RETIRED male seeking companionship maybe more. No time wasters. **Text only Mailbox: 5542315**

ITALIAN male, 46, from Oldbury, seeking female, 30-50, for friendship, possible relationship. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424371**

MALE, 59, 5ft2, looking for genuine lady, 50-55, to share the good things in life. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424353**

NICE old-fashioned gent, seeks kind, caring romantic lady for LTR. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 416905**

BLACK male, ex-marine, 6ft1, would like to meet a lady, 30 or over, if you would like a night in or out, Birmingham area, give me a shout. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424507**

ADVENTUROUS 36-year-old male, slim, dark hair, likes music, cycling and photography, seeks female for friendship, maybe more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 417235**

GENT 48, youthful outlook, likes countryside, keep fit, karaoke, seeks soul mate for fun times. N Shropshire. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 408411**

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STEVE, 53yr old male, laid back, likes most things in life, seeks female 40-50, for evenings out, need some TLC in my life. **Text only Mailbox: 4362854**

MALE, 44, very interesting person, own business, sporty, honest and genuine, likes nights out, meals out, cinema, country walks, WLTM a lady for friendship and good company leading to a permanent relationship. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 420841**

WHITE curvy lady any age, required by handsome black professional male, for discreet casual adult fun. No time wasters pls. **Text only Mailbox: 5066605**

ROB, 63, 6ft, slim, own hair own teeth, young at heart, considered good looking, OHAC, solvent, so get back if you're interested. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424027**

HELLO I am an easy going chap and I WLTM a lady, 55-65 for a permanent relationship, so please get in touch. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424131**

TONY from Walsall, mid 50s, stocky build, looking to meet a lady any age/looks/race to have fun times with, so please get in touch if you're interested. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424067**

TIM, young at heart, intelligent, fun loving, spontaneous, GSOH, WLTM a lady with a GSOH, for friendship and possibly more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424395**

ATTRACTIVE, Tall and intelligent Black male 50, lover of animals and nature seeks solvent lady of quality 50+ for romance. **Text only Mailbox: 5561456**

47 year old guy, 5ft7, dark hair, blue eyes, likes DVDs, nights in and out, seeks female, 42-49, in Leamington Spa/Rugby area, for friendship and long term relationship. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424325**

ANDY, single, 53, looking for a mature, sexy lady, age/looks unimportant, for fun and adventure. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 422893**

MALE, mid 60s, honest person, lots of interests, looking for a lady, 45-65, to share the good times with. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424321**

TALL, 63-year-old male, seeking n/s female, 45+, for hassle free fun times, in the Wolverhampton and surrounding areas. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424291**

JAY, attractive, 6ft2, single father, loves a laugh and a giggle, looking for a lady for evenings out, company and maybe more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424303**

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KARL young boyish male, 5ft 8ins, likes arts, travel, music, seeks tall, blond male for LTR. Shropshire. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 375989**

YOUNG creative, boyish lad, 28, 5ft 8ins, dark hair, slim, smooth, likes animals, classic cars, sports, bars, travel, seeks tall, supportive older male. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 387387**

GAY feminine female with GSOH WLTM gay feminine females for friendship, possible relationship. **Text only. Mailbox: 5631357**

MATURE bi male, looking for younger company, fun and good times. Can accommodate. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 425127**

JONNY, 24yrs, gay curious, not sure what to do, older men pls call me and help me understand. **Text only Mailbox: 4086857**

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BI male seeking male for fun times and friendship. **Text only. Mailbox: 4830151**

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I average around 1 to 2 phone calls a day from customers as a direct result of my Classified Advertising. I am very happy with my response levels.

Mr Causer.

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Garage and sheds cleared.
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STEVES PLASTERING SERVICE Clean and Reliable, All Work Undertaken, All Areas. Call 0121 567 5919 / 07977 262943.

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Grinsells Skip Hire.

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www.stoneskiphire.co.uk

4 Pets & Animals

equestrian corner

ALL READERS are advised to check if Horses have the required Passport information.

pets corner

NOTICE TO READERS
Please be aware that when purchasing a puppy there are some simple guidelines you can follow to ensure that you are not purchasing from a Puppy Farmer:

1. Try to ensure you visit the puppy whilst it is still with it's Mother.
2. Do not arrange to collect a puppy from any other location than that of the breeder.
3. Ensure that you are given any KC documentation, if pedigree.

Whilst Midland News Association publications take great care to avoid publication of advertisements from Puppy Farmers we cannot accept any liability should readers purchase from this kind of establishment.

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MALINOIS BELGIAN Shepherd pups two dogs, 12 weeks, chipped, vac's, wormed to date. Ideal Family pet. £350. 0794 9943933.

guns & dogs

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vets

Express & Star
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So could you by calling our friendly experienced Sales Advisors on 01902 319191.

5 Business & Farming

business opportunities

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business directory

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6 Property

overseas property

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Sell today, sign today, complete when u wish
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BCH BLACK COUNTRY HOMES

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Black Country Homes

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We can help you make a fresh start
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Purchase Agreed Within **7 DAYS**
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COMPLETE ON DATE TO SUIT
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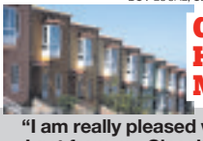

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"I am really pleased with the response I get from my Classified Advertising!"
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FOR GREAT BUSINESS RESULTS CALL
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Studios
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full time - general

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courses

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8 Motoring

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£1,950.
01922 418083.

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£7,000 ono
07491 101100.

cars under £1500

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MoT June 2017,
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BARGAIN

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9 Local Information

public & legal notices

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Yardley Birmingham B26 1AL *T489114*

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ANNOUNCEMENT OF INTENTION NOT TO PREPARE AN ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT (Regulation 5 of the Environmental Impact Assessment (Land Drainage Improvement Works) Regulations 1999 as amended by SI 2005/1399 and SI 2006/618

RECONNECTING WOODGATE VALLEY

The Environment Agency gives notice that it proposes to carry out habitat improvement works on the Bourn Brook in Woodgate Valley in the Vicinity of Ridgacre weir (SP0019283412) covering a distance of approximately 60 m.

The proposed improvement works will involve removal of Ridgacre weir on the the Bourn Brook at SP0019283412 in order to help to improve the habitat and ecology of the brook. The affected reach would be re-profiled to a more natural gradient to allow habitat connectivity. Scour protection measures will take the form of block stone.

The Environment Agency considers that the improvement works are not likely to have significant effects on the environment and does not intend to prepare an environmental statement in respect of them.

Any person wishing to make representations in relation to the likely environmental effects of the proposed improvement works should do so, in writing, to the address specified below, within 28 days of the date of publication of this notice.

Sangeetha Viswan
Reconnecting Woodgate Valley Project Manager
Sentinel House, 9 Wellington Crescent, Fradley Park, Lichfield, Staffordshire WS13 8RR

10 Personals

general

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personal

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ClassifiedAds

Sandwell Chronicle Thursday, December 22, 2016

On looks alone, the Ignis is off to a cracking start

New Ignis offers funky, good to drive small car

By Jon Reay

It's been nearly 10 years since the last of the previous generation Ignis rolled out of Suzuki's UK showrooms, and what a difference a decade has made.

While the old car managed to whip up a decent number of loyal customers over the seven years it was on sale, it'd be fair to say that it was a dull-but-worthy creation – well priced and equipped, but hardly the first word in desirability.

Suzuki is hoping that this distinctive-looking new car can succeed where the old car didn't, and provide a properly desirable alternative to European rivals.

On looks alone, the Ignis is off to a cracking start already and manages to pull off the chunky-yet-cute vibe very well indeed. There's no doubt it's a small car, but thanks to a squat stance and puffed-out wheel arches, it looks far more miniature-crossover than jumped-up city car – particularly compared to its rivals.

The interior is similarly impressive. Materials are what you'd expect from a Japanese city car – which is to say general hard to the touch and a bit flimsy here and there – but all the crucial elements like door handles and electric window switches feel pretty solid.

More importantly, the design is spot on, with brightly-coloured details and a two-tone dashboard lifting the ambience inside the Ignis considerably.

Boot space isn't huge but it's adequate

The Ignis is a comparatively tiny car but practicality is still surprisingly good. All cars get five doors, and rear passengers will find a surprising amount of head and leg room – enough for two adults to sit comfortably, particularly on SZ-T and SZ5 cars with their sliding rear seats.

Boot space isn't huge by any means at 260 litres with seats in position, but that's only 10 litres behind the larger Ka+'s. Selecting the optional four-wheel-drive system will knock that back to 204, however, and it's worth bearing in mind that only the entry-level SZ3 trim can seat five.

Safety is relatively good too, with the Ignis boasting a five star EuroNCAP rating for models equipped with Dual Camera Brake Support. Models without the feature get a three star rating, however.

There's just the one engine option: a 1.2-litre four-cylinder petrol borrowed from the Swift. It's not as perky as the 1.0-litre turbocharged 'Boosterjet' unit you'll find in the Baleno, but it's more than enough to propel the sub-one tonne Ignis along with ease. As in the Swift, it needs some revving to really get going, but if anything that adds to the Ignis's honest appeal.

Some cars get an SHVS 'mild' hybrid system too – effectively a way of regenerating the power used when you brake. Fitting this not only improves the Ignis's fuel economy a smidge, but knocks a few fractions of a second off the 0-60mph figure too.

You sit deliberately high in the Ignis, so visibility from the front and sides is excellent and jumping in and out is an ease. The steering wheel adjusts for rake but not reach, though it's still easy to get comfortable. Buttons and switches are logically laid out in front of you too, and although the touch screen navigation system isn't the most responsive around, it's easy enough to use.

The Ignis has been set up for comfort rather than sportiness – and that seems about right for a car of this type. Ride quality is good even on the larger 16-inch alloys, and things are remarkably stable on motorways.

Take things off the beaten path and things are similarly impressive. The Ignis's optional four-wheel-drive system isn't a particularly sophisticated one, but should be more than enough to get it across a muddy field with ease.

It's hard to fault the Ignis on value for money – even entry-level SZ3 cars get plenty of toys. Air conditioning, front electric windows and a DAB radio with USB and Bluetooth connectivity are all thrown in.

When you consider that barely any other cars at this price can be fitted with four-wheel-drive too, the Ignis makes all the more sense – despite the fact that it's only available as an option on the top-spec SZ5 trim level.

Priced from £11,000.

OakGarage.co.uk

Oak Garage your local RAC Approved Dealer.

Our Low Mileage Selection

13	Vauxhall Meriva 1.4T 16V Exclusiv Auto Brown Only 5000 Miles	£7,995
63	Peugeot 2008 1.6 e-HDi Active EGC Blue Only 7000 Miles	£9,995
61	Citroen C4 Grand Picasso 1.6 HDi VTR+ EGS6 Blue 7000 Miles	£8,995
63	Vauxhall Astra 2.0 CDTi 16V Elite Silver Only 9000 Miles	£8,995
63	Ford C-max 1.6 Zetec 5dr Silver Only 9000 Miles	£8,995
65	Peugeot 308 1.6 BlueHDi 120 Allure Grey Only 9000 Miles	£11,995
13	Volkswagen Polo 1.4 Match Edition DSG Silver Only 9000 Miles	£9,495
63	Nissan Note 1.2 DiG-S Tekna Auto Silver Only 11000 Miles	£9,995
63	Vauxhall Meriva 1.4i 16V SE Brown Only 11000 Miles	£7,995
62	Vauxhall Combo W/Chair Access 1.3 CDTi Auto Blue 11000 Miles	£6,495
64	Skoda Octavia 1.2 TSI S Blue Only 12000 Miles	£9,495
14	Vauxhall Meriva 1.4i 16V SE Silver Only 12000 Miles	£8,495
64	Vauxhall Astra 1.6i 16V Elite Brown Only 12000 Miles	£9,295
Citroen		
13	Citroen Berlingo Multi 1.6 e-HDi Air VTR EGS6 Silver 29k	£8,495
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Connor Newell, aged 14 from Willenhall, practises in the water

Young club member Jaden Davies, aged seven

Chloe Hall, aged 12, gets to work in the pool

Swimming club members are now making a big splash

Swimming club hoping for new wave of interest

SPORTING FEATURE

By Lewis Cox

HEATH Town Swimming Club boast a long and illustrious history – and are now appealing for 'fresh blood' in a bid to keep the club afloat.

The ASA-affiliated outfit have been a registered club for 83 years, and several of their volunteers and have been involved for around half of that time.

They have seen good and bad times, riding the wave of great highs and plunging to the depths of difficult lows.

One of those lows arrived when their home – Bushbury Swimming Baths in Wolverhampton – was forced to close in November 2006.

Numbers dwindled but, thanks to a few hardy souls that kept the club going at other baths, the Heath Town club lived on.

"I think we were down to just 16 swimmers at that time," said Sheila Ratcliffe, aged 69, a former welfare officer and now assistant coach at the club.

Important

"Keeping it running was so important because once a club folds then it's very difficult to get it started back up again."

It was the dedication of Ratcliffe and the committee that helped keep the club afloat.

They moved on to Wolverhampton Swimming and Fitness Centre shortly after and began building from the bottom again.

Ratcliffe, who has been helping out for 42 years, estimates there are around 200 members now connected with the club. But while that sounds impressive, she warns many of those are non-swimmers and some do not attend regularly.

They train on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday evenings and use both the larger and smaller pool at the facility. "Numbers dwindle with kids in the summer holidays but we expect that," she said. "We need about 35 in the big pool and 20 in the little pool to pay the centre, it's quite expensive.

Heath Town Swimming Club coach Rob Bonner at Wolverhampton Swimming & Fitness Centre

"Keeping it running was so important because once a club folds then it's very difficult to get it started back up again."

"We cater for beginners and improvers and then they go into the big pool where we train with six lanes – our head coach Rob Bonner is a Level Two coach."

Like Ratcliffe, Bonner's association with the club began as merely 'a parent'. Taking their children along to learn how to swim quickly turned into a hobby and a passion.

But Ratcliffe, originally from Wednesfield but who now lives in Willenhall, reflects the will to volunteer at a sports club is not what it once was. "We've advertised for new volunteers or coaches – that we'd happily pay – to help keep our club going but people have too many other things to do these days," she said.

"It's not like it used to be. We also have Margaret Bennion, Alan Robinson and Joan Jarvis help out as volunteer coaches and they've been doing it nearly as long as me.

"The president, secretary and treasurer are all here but we're all getting on and we need youngsters to step in, we need fresh blood."

Club president is Ray Green, awarded the MBE four years ago for services to schools and swimming. His wife Sheila is secretary and Malcolm Foley – who used to swim with Ratcliffe's daughter Wendy – is treasurer. "You can see how it is, we've all been here for a while and we love it and enjoy it but it is difficult," Ratcliffe conceded.

"I never thought I'd be here all these decades later after bringing my children. If it wasn't for my youngest grandson Connor coming to swim I might not have still been involved. But looking at it, it's my passion and my hobby. We've been associated for so long, we just do it for the love."

Sheila Ratcliffe with juniors Gracie Harrigan aged six, Zak Davis, seven, Jaden Davis and Lexie Davis, eight

Sheila Ratcliffe, president Ray Green MBE and coach Rob Bonner with club youngsters

Sport

Making big splash to attract new recruits

Page 35

Winning duo back with Brummies

BIRMINGHAM have confirmed Tom Bacon and Danyon Hume will be back in the saddle as the Brummies look to defend the National League title in 2017.

The duo played significant roles in the Surestop Brummies' third tier success this year and have both agreed a return to Perry Barr for next season.

Said Bacon: "It's great to be back with Birmingham for another year and I'm really relishing what will be a fresh challenge.

"There's new responsibilities on our shoulders as heat-leaders from the start next season but that certainly won't faze us. We've shown we can compete with the top averaged riders in the league and I'm really looking forward to another big year."

Team-mate Hume said: "After the way they helped me kick-start my career last season, there was only ever one club I wanted to be with again in the National League.

"I'm so happy Birmingham wanted me back and I hope I can progress at the same rate once again.

"Being back with the same two clubs (plus Ipswich in the SGB Championship) and having the same pit team behind me mechanically should be good for me.

Team boss Graham Drury said: "Both Tom and Danyon were very popular with the supporters last season and we simply had to get them back on board.

"They were really impressive to say it was only their second season in the sport and I'm sure they'll continue to grow with us in 2017.

"Tom will start the season at No.1 - but I'm sure both Danyon and Jack Parkinson-Blackburn will be desperate to snatch that race jacket off him as soon as they can.

"That's three of last year's title winning side back."

Speedway prices are announced for 2017 season

BIRMINGHAM Brummies have confirmed their season ticket and racenight admission prices for the 2017 campaign.

The Surestop Brummies aim to be crowned National League Champions for a third successive season.

Birmingham have the option to race at Perry Barr on the first and third Wednesday of each month, Good Friday and also some Bank Holiday Mondays.

Season ticket prices are £120 for adults and seniors. These cover the 11 National League fixtures. Challenge, Knockout Cup and Play-Off fixtures are excluded. A table in grandstand is £25.

Racenight admission is £13 adults and seniors £2 for children under six and free for those at five and under.

A 10 per cent discount at the track shop is offered with all season tickets. All 2017 season ticket holders will be entered into a special prize draw at the end of the year with the chance of winning a signed race jacket.

Application forms should be sent to 2 Lisle Avenue, Kidderminster, Worcs, DY11 7DN and cheques made payable to: Birmingham Speedway PBS Ltd.

Hosts take charge in second half

Wednesbury's Andy Clark is tackled

Aston Old Edwardians 17 Wednesbury 12

Rugby

FOR the last league game of 2016 Wednesbury travelled to Aston Old Edwardians, but, despite enjoying 80 per cent of possession, failed to take their chances.

The visitors, who had led 12-0, were also kept at bay by a stubborn Aston defence.

Within a minute of the start the visitors were awarded a penalty, but Dan Till put it wide.

It was a further 25 minutes before Wednesbury made a breakthrough as Matt Dale dived over. Within ten minutes Neal Sherwood went over for a try and Till added the extras. But within a minute of the restart Aston were awarded a penalty which they converted and, on one of the rare occasions they had the better of the Wednesbury pack, they drove over for a try, adding the conversion.

With ten minutes remaining Wednesbury threw everything at Aston leaving them exposed at the back. Aston won the ball and took advantage of the defensive lapse, running in a try and then adding the extras to win.

The next game is on January 7 when Wednesbury host Bishops Castle, ko 2-15pm.

HOPES DENTED JUST LIKE ZLAT

Albion 0 Manchester United 2

REALITY check? That could be one way of describing it.

After a six-game spell which raised both optimism and expectations, Albion found in defeat to Manchester United a reminder of just how far is left to travel, writes Matt Wilson.

Just one place separated the two teams at kick-off, yet by the final whistle it felt a far more considerable gulf, such was the comfort with which the visitors escaped with three points thanks to Zlatan Ibrahimovic's brace.

To many, the outcome would have been perfectly logical. Recent figures revealed the Baggies have the best points-per-pound spent ratio in the Premier League, while United had the worst.

In football, however, money does eventually talk. And when an expensively-assembled team meets one built on a fraction of the cost, this is exactly what is supposed to happen.

Justice

That didn't detract, however, from the sense Tony Pulis's men had failed to do themselves justice. Six days earlier, Albion could perhaps claim to be unfortunate not to leave Chelsea's Stamford Bridge with a point.

You could not make the same argument here, however. Barring the odd moment, a Chris Brunt shot straight at David De Gea, and a Salomon Rondon header wide of the post, the Baggies rarely gave Jose Mourinho's visitors reason to break sweat in front of 26,308 – the biggest at The Hawthorns this season.

Albion's cause was not helped by falling behind so quickly. Not five minutes had been played before Ibrahimovic netted the opener.

Rondon's loss of composure came after Ibrahimovic had increased United's advantage, skipping in between Gareth McAuley and Matt Phillips before firing in a shot which found its way past Ben Foster thanks to a big deflection of Craig Dawson.

But defeat in no way negated the clear progress made by Pulis's team, who at least now have a week to recuperate ahead of their next challenge at Arsenal on Boxing Day.

But it served as notice of their limitations and the work which still needs to be done.

Salomon Rondon is unable to get the better of Marcos Rojo and the Manchester United defence

Baggies remain upbeat, says Foster

BEN FOSTER insists there is still plenty for Albion to be positive about despite their home winning streak coming to an end against Manchester United.

Saturday's 2-0 defeat ended a run of three consecutive victories at The Hawthorns.

And though defeat to United dropped Tony Pulis's men seven points behind the top six, they remain firmly in the division's top half.

Foster said: "It's been a long week – a tough week. We've played United, Chelsea and, looking at the three games, Swansea was the one we wanted to win and get three points from.

"It's not just the results but the performances have been good as well. We've still got a plus-two goal difference which at this stage is decent. Loads of teams below us are in negative."

Foster could do little about either of Zlatan Ibrahimovic's goals, which came early in each half. "We started the game really well and then the goal they scored took the wind out of our sails a bit," he said.

Greenwood makes return to Heathens

DAN Greenwood is on his way back to Cradley – three years after leaving.

Greenwood won the league and cup double with the Heathens in 2013 but was squeezed out of team plans the following season.

He's since spent three seasons with Coventry but has now agreed to be back with the nomadic Heathens, who will be racing most home meetings at Wolverhampton with some at Birmingham.

Greenwood said: "I had some great times there before and I like the management. Even though I've been riding with Coventry I've never lost touch with the Cradley lads.

"It's going to be good for me to link up with Tom Perry again, he's a great signing and the team is taking shape nicely."

Greenwood ended last season on the injured list at Coventry and needed surgery on his collarbone.

Heathens boss Will Pottinger said: "Dan has been a No.1 with Coventry but he comes to us third in the averages, so there's not any great pressure.

"I'm sure he can do a good job for the team, he was the rider who won the title in 2013 with a race win and nobody will ever forget that."

Heathens have also snapped up Wearside racer Ryan Burton for their revamped side.

The 23-year-old Sunderland-based rider spent his debut season with Buxton and joins Greenwood, skipper Tom Perry, Danny Ayres – who has joined from Kent – and Joe Lawlor in the 2017 team. Heathens have, however, reluctantly released Bradley Andrews, grandson of former Dudley Wood favourite Bob from their plans.

Meanwhile Cradley's bitter rivals Birmingham have confirmed the signing of Layne Cupitt, who had a brief spell with the club last season.

Town send holders packing from Vase

Tipton Town 4 AEI Rugby 2

TIPTON Town sent holders AEI Rugby packing from the Birmingham Vase to progress to the fourth round.

It took two late efforts to turn the tie completely in Town's favour against a side who were reduced to 10 men.

Teejay Davies and Dan Patrick put Town 2-0 up but AEI, who had James Farrow dismissed for a two-footed lunge, fought back to 2-2 through Atal Hind and Jim Smith.

However, substitute Jon Patrick restored Tipton's lead on 90 minutes before Shaun Hunter sealed their passage through.

★★★

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